

The
Vexations
of a **Shut-In**
VAMPIRE
Princess

3

Kotei Kobayashi

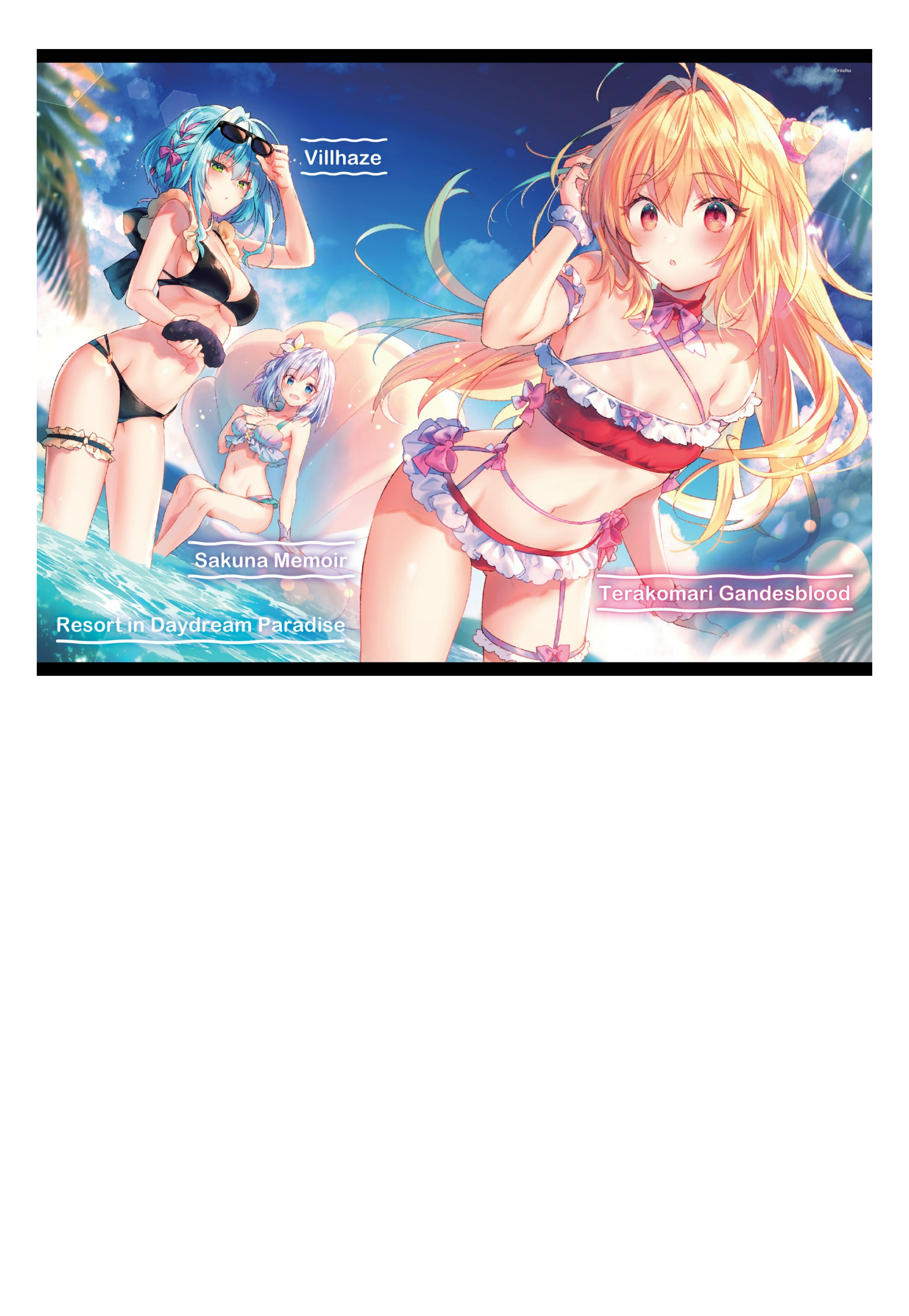
Illustration by **riichu**



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An anime-style illustration of three female characters on a beach at sunset. The character on the left has short blue hair, green eyes, and is wearing a black bikini with a white ruffled collar and a black garter. She is holding a black beach ball. The character in the middle is smaller, with short purple hair and blue eyes, wearing a purple and white bikini. The character on the right has long orange hair, red eyes, and is wearing a red bikini with white ruffles and purple bows. The background shows a sunset with orange and yellow clouds and a blue sky with stars. The text 'Villhaze' is written in a white, stylized font with wavy lines above it. The text 'Sakuna Memoir' is written in a white, stylized font with wavy lines above it. The text 'Terakomari Gandesblood' is written in a white, stylized font with wavy lines above it. The text 'Resort in Daydream Paradise' is written in a white, stylized font with wavy lines above it.

Villhaze

Sakuna Memoir

Terakomari Gandesblood

Resort in Daydream Paradise



Strategy Meeting...?

Komari

Nelia's maid?

Vill

Komari's maid

"I see..."

"Omelet rice ♪"

"Now, let's talk strategy."

Nelia
Cunningham

One of the Eight

Illustrious Generals

of the Gerra-Aruka

Republic

Karla Amatsu

One of the Five Imperial Sabers

Gertrude

Nelia's maid





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of a Shut-In
Vampire Princess

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Vexations
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VAMPIRE
princess
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Illustration by **riichu**



New York

Copyright

The Vexations of a Shut-In Vampire Princess 3

Kotei Kobayashi

Translation by Sergio Avila Cover art by riichu

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HIKIKOMARI KYUUKETSUKI NO MONMON Vol. 3

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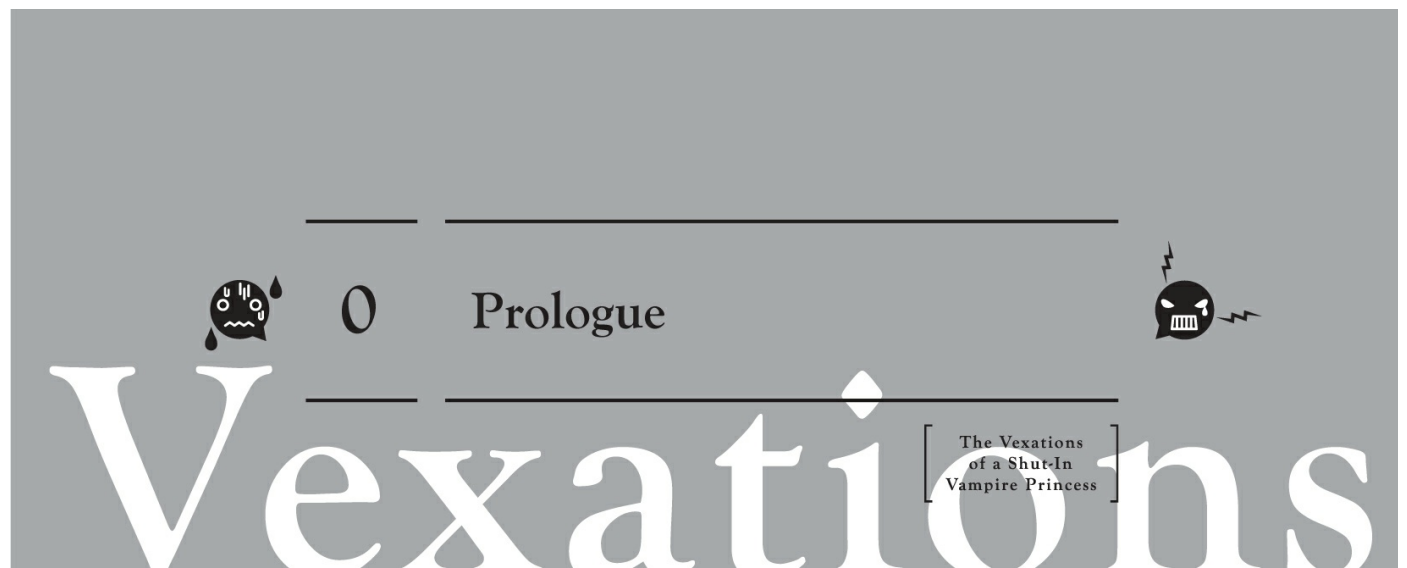
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Prologue

Vexations

The Vexations
of a Shut-In
Vampire Princess

An explosion of blood, of shouts, of magic...and of Yohann's head, too.

A dreadful slaughter was playing out all across the wide meadow.

In the east, a small elite troop of vampires—the Mulnite Imperial Army.

In the west, a combat corps of the blade-folk—the Gerra-Aruka Republic Army.

“Commander! The Moonpeach Princess’s unit is drawing near! We need to counterattack!” Caostel yelled as he tore the approaching enemies to shreds with his confusing Void slash magic. The other men, too, were pulverizing the Warblades with bloodshot eyes. Our opponents’ blood spattered, dying the grass bright red.

“DIEEE!” “Gerra-Aruka scum, the lot of you!” “I’ll show the commander what I’m made of!” “Hey, that’s my prey!” “Piss off, I saw it first!” “You’re dead, you THIEF!” “Nooo!”

.....

.....

“Rejoice, Lady Komari. They’re scaring away the enemy.”

“Yes, but at what cost?!”

I was screaming both internally and externally.

We were in the Dark Core Zone, having an official war match. My unstable breathing and heart rate as I saw my beast-like men battle was already routine, but there was something decidedly different this time around: Half of the

Seventh Unit was already incapacitated.

Bellius was hurt and couldn't move. Yohann was already dead by the time I noticed. What remained of my top brass was Caostel, actively doing his best out there; Mellaconcey, doing some cryptic dance by my side; and Vill, merrily snacking on sweet steamed buns next to me.

"We sure are having quite a tough battle this time around. Look, the enemy is near."

"Yes, near *us*! Near *you*! How can you be eating like it's nothing?!"

"I couldn't let Lady Amatsu's gift go to waste... Do you want some, too, Lady Komari?"

"I'm telling you it's not the time for sweets! But yes, thank you!"

I snatched the bun from her hand and threw it in my mouth. Red-bean paste filling. So sweet. Just like my sweet and pure naivete.

Right then, a sword came flying toward me and stabbed the ground by my feet. I immediately hid behind Vill. From behind her back, I peered out and saw the Warblades desperately charging forward to our main camp. At this rate, they might actually break through our last line of defense. I was shaking in fear.

"Damn it all... How did it end up like this?!"

"Our enemy is strong, for starters. The Moonpeach Princess is idolized in Aruka. Same level of popularity as you, after the recent occurrence."

"Popularity, okay, but it's like a flea going up against a dinosaur in terms of raw power."

"And you're the dinosaur."

"No way!" I playfully smacked Vill on the back...but it really wasn't the time for games. Death was right around the corner!

"Commander, I believe we might be in a bit of a pickle," Caostel said, his face like that of a criminal who'd failed to break out of prison and was just handed an extended sentence. "Our army is sustaining great damage, yet we haven't made the slightest dent in hers. They're sending two soldiers out against each one of ours to gain the advantage, the cowards!"

It's all your fault for being so reckless, you bunch of fools!

I couldn't let my men down, however. I was an up-and-coming Crimson Lord and had to act accordingly. No matter how much I hated it!

"Calm down. I have a plan," I said, a bold smile on my face and no plan on my mind. "But it wouldn't be too fun if I just told you outright. Vill, you're smart; I'm sure you know what I'm cooking up, don't you?"

"Sadly not as smart as you, Lady Komari. I know not what you might be thinking about."

"Think harder!"

"Commander! The Moonpeach Princess...Nelia Cunningham is here!"

Then a wind blew through the meadow, bringing about a whiff of steel.

Shocked, I turned to observe the opposing army.

There she was, standing proud atop a mountain of vampire corpses.

Her hair was peach-colored. Her uniform, girlish. She held a blade in each hand, both dripping blood. The princess of the blade nation. The Moonpeach Princess. Nelia Cunningham.

The murderer was the same age as me, and she wore an innocent smile on her face, as though speaking with an old friend. Her voice, though, was harsh.

"I'm finally here... Komari, it is time for you to become my servant."

Let's take a second to think: Which of the six races is the most violent of all?

The vampires are aggressive, of course. Just look at my unit. Our neighbors, the beast-folk, are dangerous, too, as are the Sapphires up north.

Yet there's another race, an entire group of folk who not only outright state they would kill anyone to get what they want but also actually do it.

The Warblades. The combative Iron People.

They say when a Warblade enters a relationship, they do so by first beating their romantic partner into submission. Now I'm about to find myself in that exact same situation.

How did things end up like this? Thinking back on it, the wheels of fate started rolling when I'd first received her invitation.

Ah... If only I had never gone to that resort.



Invitation for Lady Terakomari Gandesblood

Members of the Mulnite Imperial Army

Steelsplash has reached its peak, and I sincerely wish this message finds you well and rejoicing in the season's blessings. As it is custom among us Warblades, I will dive straight into the matter at hand: A series of misunderstandings has soured the relationship between Gerra-Aruka and your Empire, which is why we are writing you to join us for a tea party and hopefully ease tensions between both nations. We will be waiting for you at the resort Daydream Paradise, in the Flararal region of the Dark Core Zone. We hope you find the time to join us. We wish to form a strong bond between vampires and Warblades, and we pray for peace between all six nations.

Illustrious General of the Gerra-Aruka Republic Nelia Cunningham Summer was made for people to stay cooped up inside.

That may not sound like much coming from the mouth of an indoors girl, but surely anyone could see the stupid hot weather was reason enough not to move an inch.

So I was totally ready to stay inside all day. I had the right to!

My mind turned to the recent big event—the vexing pandemonium that was the Crimson Match.

To be quite honest, I didn't remember most of what happened at the end, but I managed to survive regardless. The Inverse Moon conspiracy was foiled, and

Sakuna had been able to overcome her past and take a step toward a new future.

Happily ever after, right?

What's even better, I got two weeks off. Why? Somehow, my Seventh Unit had emerged victorious. I guessed it was thanks to my men's unhinged efforts. Their insanity had its uses once in a while. In any case, I'd received two weeks off as a reward. Two whole weeks! Two!! Yet...

"Who goes to the beach on vacation...?"

The sky was blue. The clouds, white. The air smelled of salt, and the sun shone bright against the water...

The beach stretched as far as the eye could see, and my men were having fun playing beach volleyball. They didn't seem very focused on the game, though; for whatever reason, they kept glancing at me every once in a while. Were they expecting me to order them around or yell at them or something? Just have fun, dudes.

"Lady Komari, want a popsicle?"

I turned to the voice, which came from a girl with cool-toned blue hair. The sicko maid seemed different today, for she was wearing a skimpy bikini. Her audacity to don that in public was impressive, actually. I couldn't keep my eyes from wandering places, so I looked away as I grabbed the popsicle.

Yeah, that was good. You gotta enjoy the cold things while you can in summer.

The bikini-clad maid didn't seem to agree, though.

"Resting under the parasol is fine, I suppose, but we came all the way here to the beach. How about we go for a swim?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"There might be jellyfish in there."

"There are not. And if there were, I'd cook them right up."

“...You already know why. It pains me to admit this, but I can’t swim for the life of me. I even almost drowned once in my own home when my sister pushed me into the bath when we were little. I won’t last a second in those raging waves.”

“You’ll be fine. I will personally, intimately show you the ropes, so let’s get that pesky jacket off and show your swimsuit to the world.”

“Stop iiit! Don’t touch me! I’ll get sunburned!”

“Okay, so let me apply some sunblock. Get naked.”

“I can do that myself! First of all, there’s no rule that says you have to wear a swimsuit and play in the water when you come to the beach! I’ll just stay right here in the shade and read a... Hey! Get away! Don’t pull my clothes! Stop it! YOU PERVERTED MAIID...! Ah...”

Splat.

My popsicle scored a direct hit on her chest. The gooey substance was all over her pale body.

“Lady Komari...”

“S-sorry.”

“You mustn’t let food go to waste. Lick it off, please.”

“No, I won’t!”

I couldn’t take it anymore and ran away, but then...

“Eep!”

“Whoa?!”

...I crashed into something soft and fell on my butt. I looked up to see what happened and found the silver-haired girl Sakuna Memoir. Clad in a swimsuit, of course. And a frilly one at that—very cute.

“A-are you okay? Can you stand up?”

“Yeah... Sorry.”

She helped me get to my feet, and I stared intently at her.

Her whole body was so pale. She was so dazzling, I forgot about the heat for a second.

Then I thought back on the turmoil from the other day. Sakuna had turned out to be behind the serial murders at the Crimson Tower and was given due punishment, though they took her circumstances into account, and she was given a lenient sentence. She had to wipe the long-as-hell hallways of the Mulnite Imperial Palace for a whole week and was ordered to go to war many times with other countries. Cleaning aside, the latter punishment was insanity. Why did the Empress make her Sixth Unit battle so much? She'd waged war five times in a week and said she won three of them, which meant she'd died twice. The Empress was out of her goddamn mind. I'd considered standing up for her, but Sakuna told me it was okay and talked me out of it. She was too earnest for her own good.

Anyway.

Sakuna suddenly turned red and looked away.

"Ms. Komari, would you like to...play together?"

"Huh?"

"I think we should enjoy the beach now that we're here."

"..."

Objectively speaking, she had a point. Perhaps coming all the way to a resort in the Dark Core Zone just to spend time reading was a waste.

"You can't swim, right? Shall I teach you how?"

"Mm... I would like to learn, yes..."

"Let's get in the sea, then. We'll take it easy."

"But..."

"You'll be fine. I'll be watching you the whole time," she said, her face still red.

Not fair. I would feel like a villain if I turned her down now.

"...O-okay. Trying out new things is always good. Would you mind teaching

me?”

“I’d be glad to! Well then, let’s start by taking off your clothes.”

Sakuna grabbed the zipper of my jacket. I hesitated.

“H-hold on... Don’t you find it embarrassing?”

“Wearing a swimsuit? W-well... I would if it was only me in one, so how about you show off yours, too?”

I seriously did not want to, but I couldn’t turn down Sakuna.

Okay. We’re at the beach anyway. People wear swimsuits at the beach. I also have to get used to being in water... All right, let’s do this!

Determined, I slowly unfastened my jacket and let it fall to the sand. The salty breeze felt strangely good on my bare skin.

Then I heard cheers. I turned to the voices. My men were still enjoying playing volleyball, not even glancing at me. Huh. Okay.

“O-okay, now we’re both in swimsuits,” I said.

“Nice. It looks great on you.”

I could feel my face heating up. The compliment did not make me feel happy in the slightest. I was essentially outside in my underwear. How was I any different from that pervy maid? Preposterous.

“Eek!” I screamed. Sakuna had suddenly poked my belly.

She laughed like a mischievous kid.

“Hee-hee... You’re just like me.”

I couldn’t take this lying down. Touching me out of nowhere was not cool.

“D-damn you! You know I’m ticklish!”

“Oh, do I? ...Eek!”

“There you go! I’m gonna tickle you to death!”

“No, Ms. Komari, please! Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Sakuna squirmed and tried to flee. I wasn’t going to let her go!

Normally, I wouldn't be doing this sort of thing. Something was wrong with me. Perhaps I was acting recklessly to try to distract myself from the shame of wearing this outfit... Just as I was psychoanalyzing myself, I felt a cold stare on me. It was Vill.

"...Lady Komari, why do you let Lady Memoir win you over so easily?"

I came to my senses then. What was I doing?

"Sh-she's not. I was just playing along."

"Then play along with me, too. This is discrimination. Oh, one smile please!"
Flash!

"Hey, don't take my picture! Where were you hiding that camera?! Don't you see that this is why I can't let my guard down in front of you?!"

"Ms. Komarii! Come over to the water!" Sakuna waved at me, a wide smile on her face. Her beauty dazzled me.

"My junior is calling for me. I gotta go, as her senior," I said.

"Whatever. At least I'm glad you're interested in enjoying the beach now," Vill said.

"No, I am not. I wish I could stay in the shade just reading all day. I'm only going with Sakuna because it is my duty as—"

"Enough excuses, just go play. With me too, of course."

"Hey, don't pull me! Wait, I gotta bring my floatie!"

"I've got it right here!"

"You're well prepared, huh?!"

She handed me the inner tube, already pumped up. No need to worry about drowning now. Vill and I did some light stretching, and then she pulled me over to the ocean, letting it soak my feet. The cold water felt nice. A new sensation.
So this is what the sea feels like...

"Lady Komari, look over here."

"Huh? Eeep!"

A splash of seawater hit me, and I fell on my butt. I was soaked from head to toe before I could even process it. I knew exactly what had happened as soon as I saw that grin on Vill's face. Raging fire burned in the pit of my stomach.

Oh no, she didn't!

"Take this!" I splashed in retaliation.

The maid didn't dodge, strangely enough. She didn't even scream as she let the water drench her whole body.

Huh? Why?

"Hee-hee." She grinned. "Now I have the right to fight back."

"Wha...? You did it first!" I protested.

"That doesn't matter. It's war now! I will make you kneel at my victory!"

"Wait, how do we even know who wi—? Waaah! Hey, using water guns is cheating! Sakuna, help me out! Let's take her down!"

"Y-yes! Forgive me for this, Ms. Villhaze!"

"Two against one?! Fine... I'll take away both of your swimsuits with my magic!"

And so the battle began.

Needless to say, my scholarly intellect is out of this world. I may be stuck in the brutish position of Crimson Lord for the time being, but the plan is to complete my masterpiece of a novel and get published as an author. Experience in all sorts of fields is required to be a good writer. Surely all of history's greatest authors played at the beach at some point in their life. It's an investment for my future. No, I'm not just having fun. Besides, I have a duty to play along with Sakuna and Vill. Yeah. This isn't for fun. It's not...for... Huh? I think I am having a bit of fun...



The Dark Core Zone. A special area where the effects of all six Dark Cores overlapped. Since everyone received the blessings of the Dark Cores here, it was commonly used for each nation's "shows"—"entertainment." Yeah, right. Anyhow, we didn't come here to wage war this time around. One look at the

relaxing atmosphere in the resort could tell you no one was about to get killed.

The truth was that we'd been invited to a tea party. By a foreign commander I'd never met, no less.

The invitation had come from one of the Eight Illustrious Generals of the Gerra-Aruka Republic: Nelia Cunningham, a Warblade rumored to be one of the strongest commanders of the six nations. She had the pompous alias of the "Moonpeach Princess," too. Why would *she* invite *me* and the Seventh Unit? (Sakuna had come along uninvited). She'd also reserved the entire resort just for us, too.

I immediately thought it was a trap. Vill agreed. The Empress, on the other hand...

"Relations with Gerra-Aruka have been deteriorating because of what transpired the other day. This invitation seems to call for reconciliation, but considering how twisted those bastards are, they must be plotting something. This Nelia Cunningham might be trying to gauge her opponent's strength to better prepare for killing us. So yeah, you should go, Komari. Assess her strength instead."

Basically, she wanted me to put my head into the lion's mouth.

Absolutely idiotic! I just wanna read and eat ice cream in the comfort of my own room!

I knew resistance was futile, however. I was one of the Seven Crimson Lords. A supreme commander. Trying to go against the Empress's orders would mean death by explosion. I really need to find a way to change jobs, pronto. Surely once I got my big break as an author, she would tell me, "Oh, I guess handling two gigs at once is too hard; it's okay, you can quit the army." Hopefully.

In any case, that was why I was at this Dark Core Zone beach.

I hadn't met Nelia Cunningham yet; her maid told us to enjoy the beach while she prepared herself to see us. The rumors said the Moonpeach Princess was a habitual oversleeper. Relatable. But anyway...

"Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha! Vill, where are you looking?! She went that way!" I was having a blast. A disgracefully jolly time.

However, this was all for my novels! I wasn't *really* having fun. Well, I guess truthfully speaking, I was, but rest assured, the depths of my mind were calm—coolly analyzing the situation for future reference.

“Ms. Komari! Watch out!”

“Coming! Wh-whoa!” I barely managed to toss back the watermelon beach ball.

You lost if you let it touch the water.

The ball gracefully flew over to Vill. She ran up to it as swiftly as ever but slipped in the process, and *SLAM!!* Fell face-first in the water. I burst out laughing. It was rare seeing this ditzy side of hers.

“Vill’s out! Punishment time!”

“Curses...”

Vill lifted her head out of the water. Her frustrated expression was something else. It made me feel glad, even, since I never got to see her like that.

Good. Let’s keep on crushing this sicko maid.

We could try a round of watermelon splitting next. I also wanna do a sandcastle contest. Maybe some beach volleyball, though I’m no good at sports... No, wait, it can’t all be competitions. Just resting on my swim ring and swaying along with the waves should be fun, too... Oh gosh, I just wanna do everything!

“Ms. Komari, what will her punishment be for losing?”

“Huh? Hmm.”

I hadn’t thought of anything, even though we’d decided the loser would do anything the winner asks. In hindsight, that was quite the risk I took, but oh well, I won, so no problem.

“Let’s have her go buy us some juice. I want peach-flavored,” I said.

“Oh, then please get me an oolong tea,” Sakuna said.

“Got it. Right away,” Vill said as she stood up.

Her bikini top had vanished.

Sakuna and I screamed and ran up to her.

“WAIT! You lost it! Your top!”

“P-put it back on quickly! The Seventh Unit guys are right there...”

“But I must go buy the drinks, as it is my punishment.”

“You can do that once you’re clothed again! Sakuna, look for it!”

“Yes!” She searched around frantically while I stood before Vill to prevent her from leaving.

“Stop it! Aren’t you embarrassed?! Come on! What are you thinking?!”

I clung to her to try and stop her.

“Stand aside! I have a mission, and I must fulfill it!”

“To hell with your mission! Change of orders: hide your chest! Now!”

“We didn’t establish any rule that allowed for a change of orders. If you want me to comply, then I will have you do as I say beforehand.”

“You’re insane! Fine, what is it?!”

“Forget the fact that I lost and face me once again.”

What a sore loser!

“I found it!!” Sakuna exclaimed as though she had discovered a long-lost treasure. “Ms. Villhaze, please put it on!”

“I have conditions for that.”

“Fine! Let’s play again!”

“No, that was my condition for hiding my chest. Putting the top on will require yet another one.”

“GAAAAAAAH! You’re such a piece of work! What do you want now?!”

“My wish is quite simple. Lady Komari...will you practice swimming already?”

Hah? I was at a loss for words. Still topless, Villa kept on speaking calmly.

“Lord Helldesus Heaven saved you from drowning in a river before, remember? There might not be someone there to come to your rescue next

time. You should learn how to swim.”

“ ... ”

Everyone already knew I couldn’t swim. Not because Helldesus had spilled the beans—someone had been passing by when it happened. I feared mutiny from my subordinates, but strangely, the opposite happened; people told me things like “A weak point like that just makes you more relatable” and “How cute!” What kind of lunatic thinks not knowing how to swim is cute? Anyway, the Seventh Unit had been kinder than I expected.

“But...I can’t even dip my face into the water.”

“You’ll be fine, Ms. Komari. I will teach you. I’ll be holding your hand the entire time.”

Sakuna grabbed my palm. I couldn’t turn her down, not with her eyes sparkling like that. *Yeah. Maybe I should learn how to swim. I’d be able to do a wider array of games, too... No, wait. This isn’t for playing. This is self-improvement. I’ll train hard until I can outswim a dolphin.*



“...Okay. Would you mind showing me the ropes, Sakuna?”

“It would be my pleasure!”

“Hold up!” Vill cut in. *Just put your damn top on already.* “We can’t bother Lady Memoir like that. I will teach you, Lady Komari.”

“B-but I’m sure I can help out.”

“No, I’d be better at the job. I’m not Lady Komari’s lifesaver for nothing.”

Since when did I designate you as my lifesaver?

“Then I’m Ms. Komari’s snorkel!”

What in the world are you talking about?

“Lifesaver or snorkel, we should leave it up to Lady Komari to decide what she truly needs. So who is it? Do you want me or Lady Memoir to teach you?”

“Sakuna.”

“Really?!” Sakuna jumped with joy.

Vill, on the other hand, looked as though she’d just gotten her face torn off by a fox. *Please just hide your chest already.*

“Wh-why...? I could have you swimming better than a flying fish in a single day...”

“That’s not the issue. I just prefer her. Thank you for helping, Sakuna.”

“Thank you for choosing me.”

“Please think this through, Lady Komari!” Vill grabbed my arm. *You’re hurting me! And don’t press your boobs against me!* “Lady Memoir is dangerous. She could try to casually touch you all over as she ‘teaches’ you, or perhaps she might even look for an opening to take off your swimsuit! Look at what happened to me!”

“I—I didn’t take yours off! I’m even trying to give it back! I will instruct Ms. Komari!” Sakuna grabbed my arm, too. *Hold on, Sakuna! There’s no need to compete with her!* “You’re the shady one, Ms. Villhaze. I am sure you’re plotting something.”

“You accuse me without evidence? Did you hear that, Lady Komari?”

“You’re the one who accused her without evidence! Let go of me already!” I said.

“Oh, my accusations are not unfounded. Might I remind you this menace illegally produces merchandise using your pictures?”

“Waaah! I don’t do it with bad intentions! And I’ve been holding back from making too many lately.”

“Yet you’re still taking secret snapshots of her, aren’t you?”

“.....No?”

“Huh? Sakuna? Why the long pause?”

“I’m well aware. Lady Memoir hides voyeuristic photos of you under her pillow to induce herself into having dreams where she does all sorts of nasty things to you.”

“How did you figure that ou...?! Ahem, no, I just do it out of love for Ms. Komari! You have no right to criticize me!”

“I know I don’t. I do the same myself. Out of love for her, of course.”

“You do?!”

“And that’s not all. I also hide pictures of me beneath your pillow so you dream about me. Something Lady Memoir can’t do, huh?”

“So that’s why you’ve been appearing in my dreams recently!”

“Guh... S-so what? I can magically manipulate her brain into dreaming about me anytime I want!!” Sakuna insisted.

“...”

It felt like Sakuna had been totally shameless as of late. I brushed away both girls’ arms and yelled: “AGH! STOP! What are you two even talking about?! I already decided Sakuna would teach me! Vill, you just stand back and wa—”

“H-hey, Terakomari! How are you doing?!”

An abrupt shout caught me by surprise.

A blond guy in swimming trunks was staring at us from the beach. I glanced at Vill at the speed of light—her top was back on. She must have donned it in a split second. Ph-phew... I looked back at Yohann Helders, who slowly came up to us.

“Uh, nice weather today, huh?”

“I guess... What’s wrong? You’re acting weird.”

“N-no I’m not. By the way, Terakomari...”

“What?”

“...you look good in that swimsuit!”

“Huh? Thanks...”

What’s he going on about? This is kinda embarrassing...

Then *BAM!* Something exploded. Vill had burst the watermelon beach ball with her bare hands... *What was that for?! Take care of our stuff!*

“Right. You should practice swimming, since we’re at the beach and all. If you’d like, I can teach you—AGH?!”

The instant he tried grabbing my hand, his body became a blur—he was blown away.

Yohann skipped like a rock on the water’s surface a total of three times, then sank with a *splash* and disappeared into the depths of the sea. I turned around to try and figure out what had happened, and a bunch of vampires were already running toward the sunken vampire, their faces bloodthirsty like man-eating sharks.

“You piece of shit! How dare you speak to the commander!!” “You bastard... YOU BASTAAARD!!” “Eat justice’s fist, you sneaky weasel!!” “Die!! Die three times at least!!” “*You look good in that swimsuit...?* Don’t state the obvious, you half-wit!!”

They started hammering and axing at him at max speed. *Yup. Guy’s dead for sure... Wait, wait, wait! Why are you doing that?!*

“Hey! Don’t do that all of a sudden!”

“Commander! Are you well?!” Caostel asked, flustered. From nine meters away.

“I’m doing fine. Why are you so far away?”

“We must not get within nine meters of you. Those are the rules.”

“Wh-why? We can’t play together that way.”

“?!?!?! ...N-no. I very much appreciate that...but first we must execute this insolent beast who dared act in perversion without permission!”

The moment he shouted those incomprehensible words, *BOOM!* A flame flared up from the water. Burned vampires fell into the ocean, screaming in pain. And at the center of the fire pillar was...

“That hurt, you bastards! Wanna get killed?! HUH?!”

...Yohann Helders. His ire was well warranted.

“Right back at you, you shameless lecher. How dare you speak to the commander when she’s in a swimsuit? And worse, you even attempted to touch her soft, scrumptious, little hands!”

“I was just trying to teach her how to swim! Don’t treat me like a pervert... In fact, your weird rule of just looking at her from afar is much creepier, in my opinion!”

“Hey, come on, you guys...,” I said.

“We must stay away *because* we are disgusting! We lowly worms mustn’t pollute the atmosphere of the sacred girls’ talk! Right, Bellius?”

“Don’t think you have any right to say that,” the dog-man said.

“Anyway, Yohann, you have to understand your place as dirt!”

“WHAT?! It is our *job* as members of the Seventh Unit to serve Terakomari! And I want to support her by teaching her how to swim! How is any of what I’m doing wrong?!”

“Hey, are you listening?” I said again.

“Think with your head on your shoulders, not the one down there. It’s obvious what you’re trying to do. Besides, there are other people much better

suited for teaching her how to swim. You stay away, fire user!”

“Ha! And you’re implying you can teach her better, you deviant? I won’t let you!”

“Very well, then. We shall decide who is worthier in a duel to the death, as is Mulnite custom... Let’s hold a battle royal right here; whoever wins gets to teach the commander how to swim. If she accepts, of course.”

“Ohhh!” “Brilliant idea.” “No one will get to complain, then.” “Let’s do this!” “AAAH, I’M READY!!” “Oh my, it seems my right hand is itching to go wild.”

My subordinates were raring to go. As always.

Weapons were unsheathed, and mana started swirling. The beach was filled with bloodlust.

So I worked up my courage and...

“S-STOP IIIIIIT!!”

...screamed at the top of my lungs.

They all turned to look at me, confusion on their faces. I flinched for a moment, but I had to stand my ground. People could die from stray shots if I let them start a fight. Like me. I am people.

I had a lot to say, so I took a deep breath before speaking.

“Why can’t you get along even on vacation?! You won’t get to do anything when push comes to shove if you just try to solve everything by killing one another! Did you forget what happened last time, when preparing for the Crimson Match?! And we’re in the Dark Core Zone here, okay?! The enemy could come at us at any time! Don’t thin out our troops here, you idiots!”

“”””” ”””””

Silence fell.

Then I realized I had committed the gravest mistake in my life.

Wait. Hold on. I just scolded them? What now, Vill...?

“You are totally in the right, Lady Komari. I am relieved. This shows how much you’ve grown as a commander. Don’t forget, however, that scolding the

Seventh Unit is very likely to cause mutiny.”

AAAAAAAAAAAAH!! IT’S OVER, IT’S OVER, IT’S ALL OVER!!

I should hand out candies or something to get them back in a good mood!

Just as I was thinking about how to make up for it, they all bowed simultaneously.

“““We’re sorry!!”””

I was stunned.

Caostel said, “We were careless. Yes, it is barbaric to try to solve everything with force. We will think carefully about this next time.”

“G-good. So long as you understand.”

“Hey, Terakomari! Then who will teach you how to swim?”

“Huh? Well, Sakuna.”

“Commander, how about this? Let us hold a competition that does not entail fighting and allow the winner to teach you.”

They had zero intention of listening. Whatever, let’s get it over with.

“...Fine. Then let the best swimmer teach me.”

“Huh? Seriously?” “Crap... I can’t swim.” “Neither can I.” “Same.” “I’m definitely gonna lose.” “I won’t get to teach her how to swim now.”

Are they really that stupid?

“What about beach flags? Y’know that game like musical chairs, but with flags? Perfect place for it,” Bellius said, arms crossed.

That dog-head never had any intention of getting in the water. He was wearing a commander T-shirt, second edition. My smiling face was on his entire torso. *Gotta scold him personally later on.*

“Great idea, but we have no flags. What else could we use...?” Caostel looked around. “Oh, how about that?”

He pointed in the direction opposite of the sea. Beyond the mountains was a big tower, shining black under the summer sun. It somehow seemed out of this

world...but it was the hotel Gerra-Aruka had arranged for us. It seemed semifuturistic, so I was pretty excited to stay there.

“Whoever gets there first wins.”

““““LET’S GOOOOOOOOOOOO!!”””””

They all ran away, blowing up a sandstorm.

That’s not beach flags...but oh well. I decided to forget about the guys and go back to playing with the girls.

I turned around to Vill and smiled.

“All right! Let’s leave swimming for later and get back to that match you wanted, Vill. I’m gonna win again anyway!”

“I won’t lose this time...but wait.”

The maid put her right hand on her ear. She was speaking with someone through a Correspondence Crystal. After a while, she said, “Got it,” nodded, and hung up.

“Lady Komari, play time is over.”

“Whaaa—?! Why?! I wanna play some more!”

“No tantrums, please. That was a call from Captain Mellaconcey on recon. It appears Nelia Cunningham has woken up. Someone should come for us soon.”

Who? Nelia? What’s that?

It took me a second to remember that we weren’t here for vacation. We were here to get information on our enemy!

“Wh-what now, Vill?! I’m not ready!”

“Do not fret. We have my *Pandora’s Poison*.”

“Ohhh!”

Right, Vill had the power to see the future. I’d survived the Crimson Council thanks to that, so it should prove reliable this time around, too.

“Vill...what will happen to me?”

“I’m sorry, I was so absorbed in having fun that I forgot to use it. I will check

now.”

“Ah... Okay. Yeah, it was fun. Could you look into it now, then?”

“Yes. However, we need someone present in the tea party to drink my blood. The best option would be to have someone from Gerra-Aruka, but that won’t be possible now. And of course, we can’t have you drink it, Lady Komari.”

“Then what do we do?”

“Simple. We have Lady Memoir right here.” Vill turned to look at her.

“Huh?” Sakuna tilted her head.

“Please suck my blood, Lady Memoir.”

“Huh? ...Huh? HUUUH?! Ms. Villhaze?!”

“Don’t feel embarrassed about it. It’s for work. For Lady Komari.”

“I—I mean, yes, but... Are you okay...with me sucking your blood?”

“Yes. Please do.”

“Aw...but...”

Vill took a step toward Sakuna. The latter was taken aback, anxiety showing in her eyes for a few seconds, but then she noticed the sicko maid was absolutely serious. “Excuse me,” Sakuna said, then embraced the maid from behind and sank her teeth into Vill’s neck.

“Anh,” Vill exclaimed. She squirmed with every lick of Sakuna’s tongue on her wound. Sakuna held her tight so as to not let her prey escape and voraciously devoured the blood as her cheeks turned redder.

Vampires were naturally attracted to blood—once they drank a drop, they went into a frenzy. I couldn’t drink the stuff, though, so I didn’t understand... I didn’t know what it felt like, except that it definitely wasn’t something you should do in public!

“H-hold on, you two! Isn’t that supposed to be something couples do?!” I said, panting as I peered out from between my fingers.

They weren’t listening to me, though. I could do nothing but stand and watch. Only fifteen seconds passed, but it felt like an eternity before Sakuna’s lips left

Vill's neck. The latter then glared at the former.

"Y-you took too much..."

"Sorry! I couldn't help myself."

"It's fine... You were good."

"Th-thank you. You, too...were tasty."

What is going on? What in the world am I watching?

I had this weird hazy feeling. Like I was being left out. Like my close friends had up and gone and climbed the stairs to adulthood on their own. Actually, it didn't *feel* like it; that was exactly what just happened!

"What's the matter, Lady Komari? Oh...that must've been too stimulating for you."

"Wh-wha—?! Don't treat me like a kid! We're the same age! Actually, I'm your senior! I was born in February!"

Vill only giggled in response. How vexing.

Then I noticed her eyes were shining blood-scarlet. Core Implosion.

"I can see it now. Nelia Cunningham...Sakuna Memoir...the Seventh Unit...they're all fine. You're not dead, either, Lady Komari. It seems we don't need to take precautions this time around."

"G-good. Yeah, we have everyone here, after all," I said, trying to contain my anxiety.

Yeah. I only had to focus on surviving. Once the tea party was over, I'd get to play with them again!

"Oh, it seems they've come for us," Sakuna said.

Just then, I heard someone's footsteps. I casually glanced in that direction.

There, standing on the white sand, was a girl wearing a gothic maid outfit. She was a Warblade, young and bright, and was beaming. She was the one who welcomed us when we first reached the resort.

"I am sorry to interrupt your fun!" She bowed with perfect movement and

spoke with a warm, kind smile all the while. “Lady Nelia is finally awake. Please follow me!”



“Hey, Vill...what’s Nelia Cunningham like?”

“She loves killing.”

“Oops, I forgot my stuff back at the beach. I’ll be right back.” Then she grabbed me by the arm. “LET ME GO! I know enough murderers already!”

“You, too, are a murderer in the eyes of the people. And killers attract killers... or so an ancient saying goes.”

“This is the first I’ve heard of it! I don’t care either way! Besides, no matter how much I act like a slaughterer and put on airs, there’s no hiding the overflowing goodness in my heart!”

“It’s offset by the evil aura I radiate, so no worries.”

“The only evil coming from you are those annoying comments of yours! Please don’t say or do anything weird this time, I’m begging you.”

“Do not fret over it. I already saw everything with *Pandora’s Poison*.”

“Ugh...”

“I-it’ll be fine, Ms. Komari. Look at this lovely place she invited us to. Ms. Nelia Cunningham must be a very nice person!” Sakuna chimed in.

“Maybe! But...my gut just tells me she’s dangerous. I haven’t met anyone decent since becoming a commander...”

“But I’m decent, right?”

“Huh?”

“...Huh? I-I’m not?”

“No, yeah, you are. Yeah, maybe Nelia’s as good a girl as you, Sakuna.”

Crap, I made things awkward.

We had already showered and changed into our usual uniforms, and we were now in a room in a huge mansion by the shore. The maid had told us to wait

here while Nelia got ready. The round table in the center of the large chamber brought back memories of the Crimson Council. A life-and-death meeting I'd rather not repeat.

Well, if Vill's to be believed, then I don't have to worry about dying... I'll just try to stay calm.

"Vill...sorry if I sound too ignorant, but what kind of people are the Warblades?"

"In short, they are blade users. They say even a part of their bodies is composed of steel. This is why people sometimes call them the rusted."

I had heard about that, come to think of it. Supposedly, the people of Gerra-Aruka always had a sword on them. *They don't have laws against carrying weapons? I guess not...* I started feeling the danger again.

"Now that I think about it, this tea party is a secret, isn't it?" Sakuna said.

"Huh? Yeah, I think. We'd be seeing some phony journalists around here if they knew."

"Then that means it is completely a personal invitation. Ms. Nelia's letter didn't include the Gerra-Aruka national emblem. It would've been sealed by the president had it been an official document meant for international relations."

What does that mean? Sakuna sure worries about the weirdest things...

Then the door was slammed open.

I felt my heart almost jump out of my chest.

A girl was standing near the entrance. The first word that came to mind when I saw her: *peach*. Her peach-colored hair, tied up in pigtails, was swaying with the wind coming in from the window. She was wearing a Gerra-Arukan army uniform with a bizarrely girlish color palette.

"Welcome to my Warblade tea party, Ms. Terakomari Gandesblood."

Her eyes brimmed with self-confidence as they pierced mine.

She looked about fifteen, maybe sixteen years old, but her entire aura was different from mine. Put positively, like a veteran warrior; negatively, like a

savage warmonger; even more negatively, a freaking berserker. I mean, she had TWO swords on her. For a tea party. The heck?

Nelia Cunningham, the Moonpeach Princess, approached us at a brisk pace and sat down at the other side of the table. Her maid stood behind her, smiling all the while. Vill took notice and rushed to stand behind me, too. *Don't compete with her.*

"Nice to meet you, I'm Nelia. Fifteen years old. One of the Eight Illustrious Generals of the Gerra-Aruka Republic. Thank you very much for coming all the way here to visit us, Ms. Terakomari."

"Nice to meet you, I'm Terakomari. Thank you for inviting us."

"Hee-hee... Please rest easy. This is a casual gathering. Let us talk about the future of my nation and the Mulnite Empire."

Her tone carried a sense of gravitas. Though for good reason—she was a true general, unlike me, a pseudocommander. A genuine killer who led an army in war. *Maybe I should look closely and use her as reference.*

Nelia carefully scrutinized us one by one.

"Well then, I would like to begin our tea party right away, but...who is this silver-haired girl?"



“I-I’m sorry. I’m one of the Seven Crimson Lords, Sakuna Memoir. Um...I wasn’t invited here, actually. Should I leave?”

“No, please stay. You come in the same package as Ms. Terakomari, don’t you?”

“Y-yes, something like that.”

No, you don’t?

“Then it’s fine. I wouldn’t want any other Crimson Lord, but you are deferential to Ms. Terakomari... I can tell that much. Besides, the more the merrier, am I right? Now then, Gertrude, please bring out our best tea for them!”

“Right away, Lady Nelia!”

Gertrude, the maid, ran off in a hurry...and immediately tripped and fell.

The room went silent. She slowly stood up, then turned toward us with a smile and scratched her cheek. “Hee-hee,” she giggled before leaving the room as if nothing had happened.

Wh-what a cheery girl... So unlike my maid.

“Sorry about that. She’s always been a bit of a klutz. I told her to wake me up at six today, but she didn’t wake up until eight herself, so I ended up sleeping all the way until ten...but anyway.” Nelia flashed me a bold smile. “Let me welcome you officially again. I am pleased to have you join us for this tea party. I would have preferred to receive you in Gerra-Aruka, but considering the tensions between our countries right now, that wasn’t possible.”

“No, I’m glad you invited us here. Everyone in the Seventh Unit was very happy, too... By the way, it may be a bit uncouth to ask, but why did you send that letter to *me*? We don’t know each other, do we?”

“No, we’ve met before.”

“Huh?”

I dug deep into my memories. I had fought against the Gerra-Aruka Republic once before, but not against this girl; it had been a scary-looking old guy. Where

could we have met...?

"I figured," Nelia said, her voice sounding sad. "I knew you wouldn't remember me, but...we met at a party in the Mulnite Empire a long time ago. We talked about pudding back then."

"Oh. Now that you mention it, yeah..."

I had no recollection of it. Most of my memories from before I became a shut-in were hazy.

I tried changing the subject.

"A-anyhow, why did you invite me? I'm glad you did, don't get me wrong. Just curious."

"What would you do if I told you it was so I could assassinate you?"

My mind froze. It only rebooted after my maid poked me.

"O-obviously I'd just kill you right back! And as luck would have it, we're in just the right place to have you sleep with the fishes!"

"Ha-ha, nice one. Only joking, of course. I simply called you here because I wanted to talk to you."

Suspicious. The Gerra-Aruka Republic was a nation of musclebrains on the same level of, if not higher than, the Mulnite Empire. They killed as easily as they breathed. Honestly, I was starting to feel really stupid for fooling around so much at the beach.

"Ah, may I just call you Komari? You can call me Nelia."

"Sure, I don't mind."

"Thanks. Now we're closer to being friends." She smiled. "But there's still a ways to go. What can I do to get closer to you?"

"Let's see, how about close-quarters combat?" Vill interjected.

"Hold your damn tongue, Vill. Forget what she said. We can just talk, you know? Chat. Let's converse about world peace."

"Right. You can get to know someone better by exchanging words, not just swords... Now then, world-famous up-and-coming Crimson Lord, Terakomari

Gandesblood. What is your secret? What lies beneath that shining armor of a warrior?"

Huh? Secret...? No way...no way...

I broke out into a cold sweat. Did she...?

"Officially, the purpose of this tea party is to amend relations between Aruka and Mulnite, but I have another aim: I want to know your true power. Terakomari Gandesblood's true nature."

"I see. Well, there's no vampire out there who's as easy to understand as I am. They all call me a killing champion and the strongest vampire ever, but to tell you the truth...yes, that is all correct. No need to talk with me about it, just believe the people. They know."

"I can't trust what other people say. You can only know someone's true nature by speaking with *them*. But yes, you are quite easy to understand. I think I get you now after this short exchange."

"Wah-ha-ha! Right? Right? I've always thought the world was too peaceful. There should be more war, more frequently."

"Yes, you are astounding, Komari."

"Huh?"

"I can feel the dignity in your every word. The pride of a true killing champion."

N...NO WAAAYYY!! She bought it?!

"Y-you think? I was trying to hide it a little bit."

"Oh, it's all out in the open. I have never seen anyone radiating such a beautiful aura of bloodlust."

"Oh please, you flatter me."

"It's true! I can see it in your face; you love murdering."

I gulped. That hurt.

"No way a once-in-a-lifetime knockout beauty *like me* would commit murder!" is what I would've liked to answer, but I had already donned the mask

of a killer. I couldn't go back now and tell her I was a pacifist. I had to go through with it.

"Lady Komari...why worry about her misunderstanding now? Deceiving people with empty lies has been your MO this entire time."

"I mean, yeah...but no one's ever before told me that I look like a killer...and please don't put it like that... I'm not a liar by choice..."

I was in shock, truly.

"I like you. I'll show you to my base in Aruka later; it's close by," Nelia said.

"C-cool. So you have one inside the Dark Core Zone. The Mulnite Empire doesn't have any."

"I just made one on my own. No one was living there anyway."

"That sounds illegal..."

"It is. But there's nothing anyone can do now. Total domination through force is the Gerra-Aruka way; isn't it the same in your country? Faure isn't quite a military base, but still, Mulnite controls it as though it is their own territory—am I wrong?"

No idea. Where was this "Faure" anyway?

"In any case, war is the norm in this day and age. Places outside the Gera-Aruka Dark Core's area of effect might be out of reach, but we won't spare any effort to obtain whatever territory is inside it. Surely you must understand how I feel."

Not in a million years! Though I didn't say it out loud, maybe it showed on my face, for Nelia narrowed her eyes for a moment in amusement. *Oh crap, did she find out?*

"Hey, Komari, how many people have you killed up to now?"

"Like about five thousand, I think."

"What a coincidence! Me too."

Someone call the police! We've got a mass murderer here!

"You pass, then. I called you here to apprehend your true nature, but not only

that—I was also hoping to recruit you if you did live up to my expectations.”

“Recruit me for what?”

“To join my plans of world domination,” she said with a smirk.

Shit. She’s out of her goddamn mind.

I could tell this would lead to nowhere good. In fact, it would lead to the worst places possible, like even worse than the worst.

“Together, we could rule the world. Not even the Haku-Goku Commonwealth or the Heavenly Paradise would stand a chance. Mulnite and Gerra-Aruka could rule as the biggest country in the world, stretching from east to west.”

“Ruling the *entire* world might be a bit of an exaggeration, don’t you think?”

“Why the modesty now? You were so confident before.”

“I—I mean, sure, I could turn the whole planet into a sea of fire in my sleep and eat everyone on it for breakfast, but I’m just not that ambitious, you know?”

“Oh, don’t try to hide it. I know what you really think; you laid it all bare right here.”

Then she took a newspaper out from who knows where.

I immediately recognized the headline:

“I’ll turn the entire world into omelet rice.”

Oh, how I loathed that fraud of a journalist. Nelia had many article cutouts beside that, as well. “I put enemy soldiers in my burgers.” “Tonight’s dinner is chimpanzee.” Insanity. I’d never said anything remotely close to that! Stupid reporter!

“No matter how much you try to act like a good person, there’s no hiding the evil inside you. So how about you help me out?” Nelia asked.

“H-hold on. I just can’t picture your supposed plan for world domination. What does it entail, exactly?”

“First, we’ll destroy the Heavenly Paradise. They’ve gotten far too big for their britches recently. Then we ruin the Haku-Goku Commonwealth, those cheeky

bastards. Next, we wreck the uppity bunch in the Enchanted Lands. Finally, we annihilate the Lapelico Kingdom. What do you think? Perfect plan, huh?"

Oh, actually, I think there's quite a bit of room for improvement.

"First of all, what need is there to rule the whole world?"

"So everyone shall know my name and power! Do I need any other reason?"

"O-okay. Yeah, recognition is important. But there's no need for me to help you out, is there?"

"There is, in fact. Gerra-Aruka might be strong, but it would be a major pain if Mulnite attacked us while we were fighting another country. Plus, I believe I could do *anything* with you by my side. With you, the entire world would be in my hands..."

Nelia wore the typical expression of a girl in love. Except the object of her affections was warfare itself.

I couldn't just turn her down, though; she could suddenly say, "Oh, okay... I'll have to kill you, then." The best course of action would be to not give her an immediate answer, go back to Mulnite and talk with the Empress, and then send Nelia a letter. Delaying stuff for my future self to solve, my favorite plan. Not like I had a choice this time anyway.

"Yeah. I guess it sounds fun, but I'll have to think it through. I'll get back to you la—"

"I—I don't think that's right!"

A high-pitched voiced echoed throughout the room. I opened my eyes wide.

It was the silver vampire. Sakuna had stood up and was scowling at Nelia.

"Peace is the best. Meaningless conflict only extends the chain of hatred!"

"Oh my, Sakuna Memoir, you dare interfere with my and Komari's ambitions?"

"Ms. Komari prefers to solve things by talking it out; I know her. She would never help you achieve your 'ambitions'! Right, Ms. Komari?"

Huh? Hold on a second, Sakuna. You are completely, absolutely right, but we

have a whole plan going on here, okay? Vill, please stop her. She's gonna ruin our negotiations and get us killed.

“That’s right, Lady Cunningham. Lady Komari will rule the world by herself. There is no need for her to help out a nameless general who’s not even strong enough! Right, Lady Komari?”

STOP MAKING THINGS WORSE!! You’re just picking a fight now! She’s obviously the kind to accept one! It’s like adding fuel to a fire! The same as walking up to me and going, “You’re so tiny, ha-ha!”

Just look at her face, she’s...

“Oh, so you don’t require my help? How regrettable. Truly regrettable.”

She’s sulking! She’s puffing up her cheeks like an upset child!

“W-wait. That’s not my intention. You misunderstand,” I said.

“Right... Perhaps I was a bit too hasty. First, let us have tea and try to understand each other more, okay? Gertrude!”

“Yes, I’m here! I’ve brought you some tasty tea!”

The maid returned, in high spirits as always. She poured the black tea through a strainer. It smelled nice...but it was then that I realized the awful truth. My vampiric nose was primed to pick up this particular scent.

“How do you like it?” Nelia said, resting her head on both hands. “It’s tea flavored with blood. I figured you might like it since you’re a vampire.”

“...Whose blood?”

“Mine!” she answered with a big smile.

What kind of lunatic mixes their own blood into tea served for a guest? Though on second thought, there is a custom like that in Mulnite...

“Let’s drink, chat, and get to really know each other.”

“Y-yeah! Not right now, though.”

“...What’s wrong? You won’t drink it?”

“Well, uh, I need to mentally prepare myself, y’know?”

“For what? Are you so opposed to drinking my blood?”

“Not at all! It’s just, I, um...”

I didn’t know what to say. She was right; I didn’t want to drink her blood. Or anyone’s, for that matter. Perhaps I could force myself, but what if I threw up as a result? I couldn’t puke in front of Nelia. But I couldn’t turn her down, either. Nor could I just tell her I didn’t drink blood, period—she would think I was just pretending to be a vampire and then kill me.

So I looked to Vill for help. I winked at her.

“Leave it to me, Lady Komari,” she whispered, then snatched the teacup from my hand. “Lady Cunningham, Lady Komari says your blood is stomach-churning and refuses to drink this tea.”

“Don’t say that!”

“S-stomach churning?! Komari, is that right?!”

“It’s not!”

“It is,” Vill said.

“I’m saying it’s not!”

“So it is... Fine. Gertrude, please bring her another tea.”

“Yes... I just want to say, if it was me, I would gladly drink your blood, Lady Nelia.”

Gertrude shot me a bitter scowl as she left the room.

I hadn’t done anything to deserve her hate! It was all Vill’s fault! I glared at the sicko maid, who then took a sip of my beverage.

“The blood doesn’t match the tea well. I give it a four out of ten.”

“We don’t need your silly review. What if Nelia heard that?” I whispered.

“Oh, I absolutely heard that! I know that vampires only drink the blood of someone they’ve recognized as worthy. So that’s what this is all about, isn’t it? You’re saying this nameless general has no right to stand equal to the great Terakomari Gandesblood, hmm?”

“W-wait. I’m not going to help you out, but that’s not because I think you lack strength. I simply have no intention of taking over the world!”

“Lies! It says so right here in the paper! *I’ll spread ketchup all over the world!*”

“Who does that?! Seriously, think about it! That newspaper is lying to you!”

“But you said it sounded fun just now!”

“Now *that* was a lie! Sorry!”

“You’re full of falsehoods! Agh! Please...think it through. We can’t let someone as grand as you stay in the shadows. I was certain of it when I saw the Crimson Match—you have what it takes to bring about great calamity!”

“I don’t want to bring about calamity! I’m gonna tell you the truth right now, so listen up: *Even if* I had the power to conquer the world, I would never use it! I’m a pacifist! First of all, power isn’t meant to be used to subjugate other people! You should use it to bring peace to the world! I’m tired of all the people around me who don’t seem to get this!”

“...!”

Nelia flinched for a moment. It seemed like...she had smiled slightly. Perhaps it was my imagination, though. She immediately crossed her arms in dissatisfaction.

“I can’t believe I’m hearing those words come from your mouth! Okay, let’s pretend that what the paper says is false. But I’ve seen you warring like no tomorrow! How do you explain that?!”

“That’s all because of this maid and the Chimpanzee! I’m not doing it because I want to! I HATE war!”

“That’s not true! Who hates war and then becomes a commander?!”

“If you don’t believe it, then look up my military achievements. I haven’t killed anybody!”

“So you lied when you said you killed five thousand?!”

“Of course I di—”

“Commander! I’m sorry for the intrusion, but we have an urgent call...,” said

Bellius, who had just entered the room.

“Actually, maybe it was five hundred million instead of five thousand.”

“Which is it, then?!”

“Five hundred million!”

“ENOUGH!!”

Nelia slammed her fists on the table, but by then, my attention was already on Bellius.

He looked pooped, as if he had just run a full marathon. What had happened? Actually, wasn't he playing “beach flags” with the others?

He whispered so only I could hear:

“We have a situation with the hotel we used as the finish line.” He pointed at the black building out the window. *“It seems that was a Gerra-Aruka army station.”*

“What?”

“They mistook our race for an assault and a fight broke out.”

“What??”

“That being said, we’ve already eradicated them... They were very weak, for some reason...”

“ ”

THAT BUNCH OF IMBECILES!!

So much for me trying to carry out things peacefully!!

“Hey, Komari! Who’s that beast-folk? Your dog?”

“N-no. He’s my subordinate. His name is Bellius.”

“Oh... What a good boy. Your maid, too—you have such brilliant people at your disposal. I’m so jealous! But with all that power in the Seventh Unit, why aren’t you putting them to good use?”

“I am! In fact, we were planning on playing beach volleyball together after this...”

“That’s not good use! Fine, I get it now! You have power yet don’t know how to wield it! Well then, let us follow Aruka tradition! We don’t spare any effort to obtain whatever we desire! And once I defeat you, you will become my servant!”

“Wait, let’s not fight with our fists, okay? How about we solve this in a civilized manner by playing *shiritori*?”

“A word-chain game?! No, Terakomari Gandesblood! I challenge you to war! Fight my First Unit of the Gerra-Aruka Republic Army right here, right now!”

“Fine for us! Go, Lady Komari, beat her to a pulp!” Bellius shouted.

“Shut your mouth already! I don’t want no”—I looked behind me. The dog was staring at me—“no dillydallying before the battle! It’s time to make it rain ketchup! Challenge accepted!”

“Excellent! My First Unit is the most elite among Gerra-Aruka soldiers. Don’t think you can defeat us so easily! I’ll call them now; give me a second.”

Nelia took a Correspondence Crystal out from her pocket.

Wait. I’ve got a bad feeling about this.

“Hey, Nelia, uh, where are your troops right now? Just asking.”

“In our garrison. See that big, black building over there? You know, the hotel you’re staying in tonight. Our base is right before it. They must be training right no—”

Just as everyone in the room turned to look out the window, a huge explosion rocked the hotel.

““Wha—?!”” Nelia and I both exclaimed.

The powerful blast echoed throughout the grounds of the whole resort, shaking me to the core. Then another happened. Small explosions kept going off without pause, enveloping the hotel in flames, blowing away pieces of it... and then finally breaking it in half. The black tower leaned sideways and helplessly collapsed.

My jaw was on the ground. The sound of the tower falling was overwhelming. Smoke and dust flew up, blanketing the surroundings.

Huh? Am I dreaming?

“...Bellius.”

“That must’ve been Mellaconcey. He just loves detonating tall buildings.”

“...”

Yeah, I must be asleep. Okay then, let’s go to the beach. Since I’m dreaming, I should know how to swim, so let’s have a big sea adventure with all the fishies.

“Lady Nelia! You won’t believe this!” Her maid, Gertrude, came in, looking distressed. In her hands was a tray with a teapot and cup. Sadly, the time for tea parties had passed. “U-um! What should I do first?! Make my report or serve her tea?!”

“Give me the news! What is that?! Why is the Daydream Paradise up in flames?!”

“That’s not all! A group of vampires attacked and annihilated the First Unit! There are piles of corpses out there!”

Nelia glared at me.

Vill pinched my cheek.

I was awakened from my vision. Crap. This wasn’t a silly fight between us two anymore. We had attacked another country in the Dark Core Zone and destroyed their facilities. This wasn’t war for “entertainment” anymore.

“Komari... You sneaky little...!”

“Sorry.”

“YOU THINK THAT APOLOGY IS ENOUGH?!”

Nelia drew her swords and jumped at me. Just as I’d resigned myself to death, Vill carried me like a princess and ran like the wind. Nelia chased after my sicko maid. Sakuna sprinted in the opposite direction while Vill poured mana into her Correspondence Crystal.

“Maid Villhaze here speaking on behalf of Commander Terakomari. Everyone, retreat. Everyone, retreat. Leave this place immediately and return to Mulnite. Gerra-Aruka is now our enemy.”

“Hold oooooooooon! We can’t just dip! We have to at least pay for the tower or something, or this’ll be an international problem!”

“It already is. We have an escape route already, so hold tight!”

“You’re really well prepared, huh?!”

“I can see the future, after all.”

“Then try coming up with a better solution to this mess beforehand, DAMN IT!!”

Vill threw a smoke bomb and sped up.

There was nothing I could do at this point. I just let myself be transported to safety.



“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!!”

I clutched my head and wailed.

I was still along the coastal region of Flararal, but far enough away from the resort. No signs of the enemy approaching—it seemed like we managed to lose them.

My life was saved, which was good and all, but I couldn’t be happy about the circumstances.

That was the greatest blunder of my life. Up until now, any time my subordinates caused trouble, it had been contained to the Empire. But things were different this time. Their troublemaking was, at this point, quite literally on an international scale.

“The responsibility falls on me, doesn’t it?”

“Objectively speaking, yes. You might get dismissed from the Crimson Lords.”

“Hell yeah! I’m gonna freaking die!! AGH!”

Getting fired from this job was not figurative, but literal; I didn’t want my first death to be by explosion. Or second, or third! I didn’t want to die, period! I sat down right there and hugged my knees as I stared into the horizon.

“I hope everyone was able to get away...”

“They did. Not a single one failed to flee...which is a bit unnatural, I think.”

“Why?”

“That’s what I don’t get. I’m sure Nelia Cunningham has enough power to catch at least a vampire or two. It’d be best to assume she *let us go*.”

“Did she forgive us?”

“I don’t believe she would... Lady Komari, we must plan our next move.”

“Look at the sea! It’s so pretty! Let’s play castaways!”

“I very much would like to drift away in the ocean, but now is not the time to escape reality. Nelia Cunningham must be thinking of officially declaring war on us soon. That Warblade is a fierce opponent...so we must carefully consider our strategy.”

If possible, I would rather be friends with all the people in the world. So how had I ended up here?

Just as I was lamenting my fate, a faint light shone in Vill’s pocket. She got a call on her Correspondence Crystal.

“Yes, it’s Villhaze... Yes, I understand... Lady Komari, it’s Her Majesty the Empress.”

She handed me the Crystal. I immediately held it to my ear, and a thunderous voice reverberated in my eardrums.

“Hey, Komari! You enjoying the resort? Oh, I wish I could’ve joined you, but I’m simply swamped with work. I won’t allow a chance to just slip through my fingers, though, so once you come home, let’s go to the palace pool, rub sunblock on each other, and have some slippery fun together, okay?”

“Not okay! If that’s everything you wanted to say, I’m hanging up!”

“Wah-ha-ha! I’m kidding. Don’t worry about me, I’ll be doing all the rubbing, so you just relax and enjoy my... Wait, don’t hang up! Cutting to the chase, we’re welcoming an envoy from the Heavenly Paradise in three days. They want to talk about the future of all six nations.”

Don’t we have enough international developments already? I’m tired.

“Cool. Have fun. I’m busy thinking about the future of my diet—wondering what to have for dinner tonight.”

“This is almost as important as your dinner, okay? Listen, this envoy is Karla Amatsu, and she really wants to have a talk with you. I’m sorry about cutting your fun short, but could you come back home quick?”

“...What about my tea party with Nelia?”

The plan was to stay overnight. The Empress, however, cackled in response.

“Y’know, I was watching from here with my farsight spell. You call that a tea party? Come home and don’t worry about Nelia Cunningham.”

“You knew?!”

I was knee-deep in despair. Why did all this have to happen to me? There was no doubt in my mind that this Karla Amatsu would also come asking us to speak with our fists or whatever.

“Bw-bwaaaah...”

“Don’t worry, Lady Komari. I’ll poison Nelia Cunningham to death if she ever comes for you.”

My maid gently stroked my hair, but that didn’t serve as any consolation. I stood up with the swiftness of a cat and yelled my lungs out at the endless sea.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAHHH! WHY MEEEEEE?! I JUST WANNA ENJOY THE BEAAACH! I WANTED TO PLAY WITH FIREWORKS AND HAVE A BARBECUE AND GAZE AT THE STARS WITH SAKUNAAAA!!”

“Calm down, Lady Komari. We can come back to the beach at a later date.”

“But today will never come back! I want to treasure each and every single day of my youth!”

“Hard to believe those are the words of a shut-in. Come on, let’s go home.”

“NOOOOOOOO!!”

She forced me back home.



The vast shore was empty.

Her peach-colored hair swayed in the wind. The Moonpeach Princess, Nelia Cunningham, sheathed her blades, sighed, and looked up at the sky.

The firmament was as clear as her mind.

“Hee-hee... Heh-heh-heh. Yes, she’s outstanding. I wasn’t wrong.”

The hotel was destroyed. Her First Unit, annihilated. She had lost...yet the only emotion in her heart was joy. The entire world would change if she got Terakomari. She could finally exact revenge on the inhumane people of Gerra-Aruka.

“Lady Nelia! I can’t believe how mean Terakomari Gandesblood is! And after you invited her to a tea party and everything! Who does that?!”

Gertrude approached Nelia, grumbling. Her maid uniform was torn and sandy from battling. Nelia brushed it off as she said: “Komari didn’t want that to happen. It was her subordinates who acted recklessly. Or perhaps they knew about Madhart’s plans.”

“Huh? They know we were trying to kill Terakomari?”

“Perhaps.”

Nelia played with her hair as she mulled it over. Gerra-Aruka hadn’t been planning on keeping this tea party peaceful to begin with. Her orders were to lure Commander Terakomari Gandesblood, then kill and capture her. Except Nelia had never intended on killing her. She had no reason to follow the orders of that pesky president.

“We can use Komari to stop Madhart in his tracks.”

“No way! We can’t put a leash on that wild vampire.”

“No, it’s clear her true nature isn’t that of a domineering murderer. She’s kind.”

“She is...?” Gertrude couldn’t fathom it.

“With the power she has, I’d expect her to show more pride and conceit, yet she wasn’t like that. She hasn’t changed in the slightest from that day... Komari has really inherited my mentor’s will.”

“Mentor...? I don’t get it, but it’s obvious Terakomari is dangerous.”

“She’s not. She didn’t show any interest in my plans for world domination. She’s not like Madhart or even Dad... She’s a true pacifist.”

“Couldn’t it be she wasn’t interested because of how haphazard your plan is?”

“What? It’s perfect.”

“But it’s not elaborate.”

“I suppose,” Nelia admitted, laughing.

Nelia didn’t wish to conquer the world. It was all a bluff, a folly to assess Komari’s nature. People changed as time passed, just as Nelia herself had. That was why she’d needed to confirm Komari was still the pacifist she used to be. After all, the newspapers had evidence of her reckless words and acts. She needed to verify it.

If Komari had wanted to join the conquest, then that would be that. It would’ve meant that she, too, had been raised to be a warmonger in the end. If she didn’t clearly oppose it, then that would’ve meant she was a coward. Someone who cowered at the words “world conquest” wasn’t worthy of being Nelia’s partner.

“...But she took the third option.”

“First of all, power isn’t meant to be used to subjugate other people! You should use it to bring peace to the world!”

She’d meant that. Nelia could tell from her expression and tone that she truly wished for world peace from the bottom of her heart. But that whole mess had happened before Nelia could form a proper alliance.

I should’ve gone after her and caught her.

“Gertrude, I’ll make Komari my servant.”

“Okay...”

“She’s essential for my plan. That vampire could turn the whole world on its head.”

“Um...and you don’t want her to be an ally or a friend, but a servant?”

“I want her to wear a maid outfit. She’ll be my loyal servant, just like you.”

Nelia put her fingers on Gertrude’s chin. The maid’s cheeks flushed as she stared into her mistress’s eyes.

“I—I am your number one servant.”

“Heh... No need to get jealous. I know that very well.”

“Lady Nelia...”

Then Nelia’s Correspondence Crystal shone.

She felt like clicking her tongue. This Crystal wasn’t a regular one—it was specially provided to the Eight Illustrious Generals of Gerra-Aruka as a direct line to the president.

Nelia flicked her fingers to pour some mana into it. The magical power amplified within the Crystal, and a light shone through, forming a screen in the air.

A man in a suit appeared on it. He looked like a sea monster emerging from the coastline from her point of view.

“Cunningham, what in the world are you doing?”

“Oh my, President Madhart. Your bed head looks as gorgeous as always.”

Gerra Madhart. Head of state of the Gerra-Aruka Republic.

After being elected as the first president with overwhelming support from the people, he had pushed all sorts of progressive policies and doubled the nation’s power. He was considered a national hero, but only in the official history. Nelia had lost everything due to him.

“Rainsworth told me you failed to kill Gandesblood.”

Nelia mentally clicked her tongue. So she really was being watched.

“Is there a problem?”

“Of course there is. This is a disgrace. You don’t understand what’s best for our country. Why didn’t you kill her? Why did you let her escape?”

Because I wanted to. She couldn’t just say that, though. She would be thrown

into prison at the slightest hint of insubordination, and then it would all really be over.

“I did everything I could; Gandesblood was just one step ahead.”

“She is fierce, true. But you promised you would kill her, no matter what. It was your mission.”

“Yes, and I am sorry for that.”

“You couldn’t even kill a single member of the Seventh Unit! You must know that it’s been impossible to hunt Peace Spirits in the open as of late. Do you have any idea how much we could’ve gained if you had captured those five hundred vampires?”

“Gain? What meaning is there in profiting from inhumane experiments?”

“That’s slander. I am providing a pleasant life for those in custody in the Daydream Paradise.”

“Your death sure won’t be a pretty one.”

Madhart snorted in dissatisfaction.

“You’ve gotten cocky lately. But don’t forget that I could erase everything you hold dear with a snap of my fingers. And no matter how hard you wail, I won’t have mercy. Anything in Gerra-Aruka’s way must go.”

“Yes, yes. First on the list are foolish politicians who only make the people suffer.”

“Nelia Cunningham, I can tell you’re pale right now.”

His cold grin pierced her chest. She clenched her fists tight out of reflex.

That man was the root of all evil. Five years ago, he’d seized her country and thrown her family into prison. He needed to go down...but she didn’t have the power to defeat him at the moment.

“No worries. I’m just flabbergasted by how high-handed you are.”

“It’d serve you best to hold your tongue once in a while. Surely you don’t want to end up like your father.”

“...”

“In any case, at least they only destroyed the hotel. Rainsworth says our underground secrets weren’t discovered. This event should serve as a good excuse to go to war. Do your part well from now on, Nelia Cunningham.”

The screen disappeared without a trace, leaving behind only the calm sound of the waves.

Nelia took a deep breath. She remembered what her father had told her—draw a triangle on your palm and pretend to eat it to calm down. So she did, but her ire only raged stronger.

“I HATE that stupid old man!!”

She kicked a beach ball that was lying nearby. Gertrude jumped at her sudden yell and shouted herself: “Aieeee, don’t scream, Lady Nelia!”

Nelia couldn’t contain it any longer. She had to execute that filthy Madhart.

Only the strong of heart could change the world. She needed to make hers indomitable.

“I will change Aruka. That is my mission.”

Nelia glanced at the ruined hotel. It was officially a Gerra-Aruka resort, but the truth was far from it; the place was a special military facility that only those close to Madhart could access. It was hell on this world.

How Nelia wished they had destroyed the underground, too.

She held out hope. With the power of that vampire, she could revolutionize Aruka.



Three days later, I was in my room, on my bed.

I'd woken up from a nightmare. A dream so horrifying, I was trembling.

Nelia had turned into a vengeance-seeking demon and captured me. She hung me upside down. *"Let's use Komari's body as tea leaves for our party,"* she'd said, the absolute maniac, and trapped me inside a tea bag. Then she threw me into boiling water, infusing the tea with my flavor, before casting me aside like I was nothing. Yet once she had finished her cup, she stated, *"How scrumptious. Let us make another serving,"* and tossed me in again, then...

"Good morning, Lady Komari."

"Bwah?!"

I fell off the bed.

Thankfully, it was my maid who'd greeted me, not the girl who'd used me as tea.

"Please don't scare me like that, Vill..."

"Did you have a bad dream?"

"Yeah. But it was just a dream. And now I'll have a good one. Good night."

"Come here, then. I will sing you a lullaby."

"Please."

Vill beckoned me under the blanket, and I slid next to her.

Yeah. Let's just sleep until noon. I get the weird feeling that summer vacation

ended yesterday, but I'll just treat the rest of my life like it's break... Uh, wait a second. I feel like there's something wrong here...

"What are you doing in here?!"

I pushed Vill away and immediately jumped off my bed.

Compared with this, that nightmare was a hundred times better. Maybe it was for the best that I'd woken up. Who knew what she could've done if I hadn't...? Couldn't let my guard down in front of this sicko maid for a second!

"Get out of my bed! Now!"

"Sure. Let's get out and go to work."

"..."

Ah, it's hopeless.

Now I really wanted to stay under the covers. Just thinking about work was depressing. The fun times were over. Well, these past three days hadn't exactly been fun, though. Those were seventy-two hours of constant stomachaches.

I'd succeeded in staying cooped up inside without issue since coming back from the tea party, but I couldn't relax. Instead, I'd been worrying the whole time, wondering when the assassins might come for me. Couldn't even take a single nap in those few days from all the stress.

"I've gotta apologize to Nelia..."

In hindsight, that wasn't the right way to treat someone who'd invited me over for tea.

Besides, despite her almost killing me, I couldn't bring myself to hate her. She just felt very earnest. Though I wished her efforts were directed toward a better outlet.

"We can do that the next time we meet. Let's focus on work for now."

"I don't wanna work! I'm sure it's just war with the Chimpanzee again anyway!"

"Want to go back to sleep, then? Here's your body pillow."

"You are not my pillow! And why were you in my bed to begin with?! Don't

you sleep in your own house?!”

“No.”

“Why?”

“I don’t have one.”

“Where do you live, then?!”

“Here.” She pointed at the floor.

...Huh? What’s she saying?

“You’re kidding.”

“I am not. My things are right there in the closet. Want to take a look at my clothes?”

Okay, Komari. Calm down.

It’s true that Vill follows me around like a shark sucker during all my waking hours, be it a weekday, weekend, or holiday. We always have breakfast, lunch, and dinner together, and she bathes after me all the time. But she has to go home after I fall asleep, right? Then she comes here for work just before I wake up, right? We don’t live together without me knowing, no way. What kinda horror movie is that?

“If you won’t go back to sleep, then let’s get to work. You have a meeting with Lady Karla Amatsu today.”

“Hold on, Vill. I want to talk about your private life for a second.”

“I am very glad to see you showing interest in my personal life, but we don’t have the time. We’ve already made Lady Karla Amatsu wait for three hours. She might snap and kill you if we don’t go quick.”

“Why didn’t you wake me up sooner?!”

“Do not fret. I handed her your latest novel to pass the time.”

“WHYYYYYY?!!!”

Wipe that smirk off your face! That’s no achievement to be proud of!

I wailed as I took off my pajamas and put on my military uniform. I had

noticed recently that the maid wouldn't interfere with my changing if I got dressed at the speed of light. I washed my face, brushed my teeth, and went to the restroom. Then Vill handed me a loaf of bread, and I held it in my mouth as I left the room at full tilt.

"There we go, Lady Komari! You're so responsible now!"

"We're three hours late, so I don't think so! Gosh, what kind of insensitive prick makes a person they're just meeting wait so long?! And she's reading my book right now! AGH!!"

"Is it so bad that she's reading your writing?"

"It's embarrassing! And, like...there's some problematic content in there this time around."

"Because it's a serial murder mystery?"

"Not that... The title's *Twilight Triangle*. Make a guess from that."

"I can't. You mean they play the triangle? The story is about music?"

Okay. I guess Vill's entirely ignorant about love. She's purer than I expected. In any case, I had to get there fast. I needed to apologize and snatch back my novel. I couldn't let her read through to the end. If Karla Amatsu was the serious type, she might react by saying, "Ugh, you wrote this? Gross."

"Hey, Vill...what's Karla Amatsu like?!"

"She loves killing."

I made a U-turn. But the maid grabbed me tight from behind at an amazing speed.

"LET ME GO! Why is everyone I meet a murderer?! Don't you think the characters should be more balanced?! I would NEVER write a novel like this!"

"Don't worry. I hear she's a very earnest killer."

"That's even worse!!"

"Although she's a commander, no one's ever seen her fight with enemy soldiers. She stays at the camp the whole time and gives out instructions from there."

“Wait, isn’t that just like me?”

“She’s similar, though it seems she won the National Murder Championship when she was little.”

“Okay, back to bed.”

“The Amatsu lineage is outstanding, as well. I hear she’s a rich girl—her family owns a giant conglomerate. She has prowess, social status, and authority. A monster. She could kill anyone, physically or socially, with the snap of a finger.”

“No way! I’m going home!”

“That would only increase your chances of getting done in.”

“Ugh...” I groaned from deep within the trenches of despair.

Oh well. It was my job. How could I face my subordinates if I disregarded my responsibilities? I would be faced with death instead. They would kill me, and that would hurt a lot.

“Vill, don’t say anything weird this time, okay?”

“Understood, I will only say nonweird things.”

“...”

I couldn’t trust her. But oh well.

I had to hurry and meet Karla Amatsu. Though, how I wished I could delay that forever.



I wanna change jobs, Thio thought.

It had been three months since she had joined Six Nations News. She had already lost track of how many times she’d thought *I wanna quit* already, but now she was serious. No one had told her this job would put her life at risk.

“Heh-heh-heh... I can smell it. The scoop of the century!”

There is no such smell, Thio thought.

The impish duo from the Mulnite branch of Six Nations News—the Sapphire Melka and the cat-eared girl Thio—were hiding in a bush in the garden of the

Mulnite Imperial Palace. They had been holding their breath for about five hours already. *"We will wait for our prey to come, scoop in hand!"* Melka had said, but honestly, Thio wasn't interested in the slightest. She just wanted to go home and sleep.

"Ms. Melka...let's give up alreadyyy. Mr. Scoop took the day off because of a bellyache."

"Look! That's the head of the Second Unit, Helldesus Heaven! Let's interview him."

"Wait, Ms. Melka! Please!"

Thio grabbed her in a frenzy, holding her hips.

"Let go! Our prey is getting away!"

"They'll get mad at us if you just talk to him! They'll throw us out of the palace and execute us!"

"Hmm... That is a possibility."

Melka nodded and hid back behind the bush. Thio was losing her mind.

Outsiders couldn't enter the Mulnite Imperial Palace without permission. Though it was surrounded by a magical barrier to keep people out, there were many ways you could slip through. Such as using teleportation magic, which the terrorists from before had done, or the insane method of becoming an inanimate object while crossing through, since the barrier only kept out living creatures.

Melka and Thio had used a mix of both this time around. They'd gotten the assistance of a vampire from Six Nations News. They killed the poor girl despite her wails and smuggled her lifeless body inside. After a while, she was revived by the Dark Core and built a portal on the grounds, from which Melka and Thio entered. An absolute crime, for sure. The vampire girl had gone home in tears.

I gotta quit. It could be me next, Thio thought.

"By the way, Thio, is the camera working well?"

"Huh? Yes, it's fine."

Thio tinkered with the device hanging from her neck. *“Learn some other skill beside sniffing! I know, you’ll be our photographer! Here comes Thio, the greatest war photojournalist of all!”* Melka had said. Unhinged. Thio held out the camera to her.

“Look, here’s a photo of a butterfly.”

“Butterflies don’t put food on the plate!”

Melka hit her. Absolutely outrageous. She hadn’t been thinking of food when she took that picture.

“Listen. You need to photograph scoops! If you don’t get a picture of Karla Amatsu, I will rub your ears and tail for a whole week!”

“Amatsu...? Amatsu...”

“Karla! You forgot about it? We know for sure, according to our Heavenly Paradise branch, that one of the Five Imperial Sabers, Karla Amatsu, left for the Mulnite Empire. They’re about to cut the greatest secret agreement of the century! It would be unacceptable as a journalist, nay, as a human being to let this chance go!”

Right, she said that before, Thio thought.

“Oh, about that...”

Thio projected the pictures she’d taken in the air. Photography turned out to be more fun than expected, so she had gotten quite a few shots. There was one of the minister of justice and the minister of education smooching in the shadows, one of Commander Flö-something having her skirt lifted by the wind, and of another named Del-so-and-so without their mask. None of them were worth keeping, so she deleted them.

This is the one, she thought as she showed it to Melka.

“Is this her?”

“Huh?” Melka’s eyes became tiny dots.

The photo showed a girl who looked like a Peace Spirit.

“She entered that building like three hours ago...”

“You doofus! Say so sooner! Good job!”

This time, Melka slapped Thio on the head. *Why am I getting hit while being praised? I’m definitely quitting.*

“You can see one of the palace’s pillars in the background. Now we have proof that Karla Amatsu visited Mulnite! As for her objective...”

Then they saw a girl running across the hallways, a small vampire clad in a red military uniform. Even Thio recognized her. The murderous commander who was all the rage lately. Terakomari Gandesblood. *Must be good getting paid to just do as you please*, Thio thought. Melka smirked.

“I see, so Terakomari Gandesblood is involved, as I suspected. This vampire sure knows how to keep us entertained! Let’s go, Thio! Time to take the sneakiest photos to shock the whole world!”

“Secret photography is a crime, though...”

There was no time to think deeply about the implications of her actions, however.

Melka grabbed her by the arm and moved from bush to bush toward the building where they would meet.

I wanna go to the restroom..., Thio thought.



I had never met a person like Karla Amatsu.

The black-haired girl sat on a luxury sofa in the Bloody Spew Hall of the Mulnite Imperial Palace. She wore a frilly kimono typical of the Heavenly Paradise. Her face as she silently read my manuscript was worthy of preserving in a painting. Her cold eyes left an unfriendly impression, but... Wait, Komari. Stop observing her. Say sorry.

Then I noticed: In front of her, their back to me, was a blond who I recognized.

“Your Highness...? What are you doing in here?”

“Ohhh! You’re finally here, Komari. We got so tired of waiting that we were just talking about sneaking into your bed together.”

It was the Empress of the Mulnite Empire, Lady Karen. Though outwardly she looked the part of a head of state, on the inside, she was even weirder than my sicko maid and the Seventh Unit put together. This lady should not be approached without caution.

She came toward me without an ounce of restraint and started fondling my hands.

“Oh, is that a little tan I see? Hope you had fun at the beach.”

“I didn’t, really. Everyone else had a blast, though. Now let go of me.”

“But I heard you had a great time, too.”

“I am an intellectual, calm and collected at any moment. Never would I make a racket at the beach.”

“I see. Okay. But I should let you know I asked Villhaze to take pictures.”

The Empress showed me some photos. There I was, running around with my inner tube in hand and a huge smile on my face. Another one showed me splashing water at Sakuna, also with a huge smile on my face. Then there was one where I was holding Sakuna tight, grinning. And another where I was doing a peace sign while grinning broadly.

“.....Ha-ha-ha. These are fake.”

“Then I can show them to everyone, right?”

“DON’T YOU DARE!!”

I jumped to grab the photos, but she immediately squeezed me and held me in place. I knew then that I had fallen into a trap.

“You missed me so much that you wanted a hug? How cute!”

“No! Let—me—gooooo!”

“Oops.”

I pushed her as hard as I could to set myself free. The perverted Empress grinned as she waved the pictures above my head... *Damn it, why does she have so many?!*

“Vill, when did you take them? Have you heard of privacy laws?”

“I am sorry, but it is your fault for being so absorbed in the fun that you didn’t notice. Just look at the one I took where you’re even posing with a peace sign. I yelled *Say cheese!* then, remember?”

“How could I be so stupid?!”

Silly dumb Komari. How could I even call myself a scholarly intellectual?

I had to get those pictures back at any cost. But then...

“Ms. Gandesblood sure is an amusing girl.”

Her voice was clear like a wind chime, but her tone was also obviously sarcastic.

I turned on reflex. There she was: Karla Amatsu, looking at me with a serious expression. She was shooting daggers at me, but that was little wonder. I had made her wait for three hours, and now I was throwing a fit without even saying hello. She was rightfully fuming.

The Peace Spirit girl looked at my embarrassing pictures on the table and smiled.

“My, how adorable. Were you on vacation?”

“Something like that. We went to a beach in the Dark Core Zone.”

“Oh. You don’t have to feel embarrassed about this; look at how cute you are. No need to make a scene because of it and delay our meeting further, either.”

“...R-right. I’m sorry.”

“Hee-hee. You truly are amusing.”

“I know, right? Lady Komari is so cute and funny.”

That was sarcasm, you nutty maid. The kimono girl showed a strained smile.

“Excuse me, I was just surprised to see Ms. Gandesblood wasn’t as I expected.”

“I—I see. So I’m even more imposing than you imagined, huh?”

“Yes, that’s right,” Karla said monotonously, then stood up.

I heard a pleasant chime. She had a tiny bell tied to her wristband. I suppose it

was fashionable in her country.

“Excuse me for not introducing myself first. I am Karla Amatsu, one of the Five Imperial Sabers of the Heavenly Paradise. Fifteen years old. I’ve come here to discuss the Gerra-Aruka Republic’s recent actions. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Gandesblood.”

She bowed gracefully.

The Five Imperial Sabers. So a mass murderer, then.

As you might’ve guessed, the official names for commanders differed by country. There were the Eight Illustrious Generals, the Seven Crimson Lords, the Six Arctic Masters, the Five Imperial Sabers, the Four Holy Beasts, and the Three Draconic Meteors. The numbers indicated the number of top commanders in each country, obviously, and reflected their military might. Nations with seven or eight generals were tremendously violence-oriented. Though, I just read about this stuff from a book.

In any case, I couldn’t stand there forever. I sat down.

Karla in front of me, Her Majesty by my side, and Vill behind me. I put on my commander face and cleared my throat.



“Now, then. Excuse me for making you wait. I had some things to take care of.”

“Yes, I understand sleep is very important. However, I wish you could be just a tad more considerate of someone waiting to meet you.”

“Sorry...”

I couldn't look her in the face. She was scary in a different way from Nelia. Karla frowned and said:

“It's all in the past now, though, and it'd be better not to dwell on it. Since I've already spent three hours here, I'll cut right to the chase. I'm here to form an alliance.”

“An alliance...?”

“Yes, I would like the Mulnite Empire to join hands with the Heavenly Paradise. Remember what happened during the Crimson Match the other day? Near the end, you infiltrated Gerra-Aruka and turned part of their country into a wasteland.”

“No, that was a meteorite.”

“It most certainly was not. Everyone in all the nations knows; it was in the papers. Your Majesty, it was Ms. Gandesblood who did that, correct?”

“Correct.”

Wrong! Why does everyone trust Six Nations News?!

But, well, I suppose I'm better off if they spread rumors about me being the strongest of the vampires...or is it?

“Which should mean that relations between the Mulnite Empire and the Gerra-Aruka Republic are currently in a terrible state. We could tell there were tensions between you two before, but now that Ms. Gandesblood has pulled the trigger, things couldn't be worse. We expect a conflict might break out soon, and it won't be the entertaining kind.”

“You're right. The Mulnite Empire doesn't get along with them at all. Ever since the Aruka Kingdom became the Gerra-Aruka Republic, or since Madhart

took over as president, that is, we've been fighting over territory inconspicuously. They sure are a cunning bunch," Her Majesty said.

Huh? Gerra-Aruka was a kingdom? Vill seemed to notice my confusion, so she whispered an explanation into my ear:

"They became a republic five years ago. The current president, Madhart, spearheaded the revolution. He used to be a general for the Aruka Kingdom and led his troops to capture the royal family and other nobles, then held an election and won. He's been doing as he pleases with the country since. Also, the 'Gerra' in Gerra-Aruka comes from his first name."

Wow. The more you know. Crazy how he named his country after himself, too. Imagine if I became Empress and called it the Komari Empire. I would puke.

"Anyhow, you can't avoid conflict. I'm sure President Madhart will soon try something against you. If you don't take any precautions, many of your people might die. So..." Her bell echoed. Karla put her right hand on her chest and said, "How about you form an alliance with the Heavenly Paradise? I won't say we're incredibly powerful, but I think we could be of help, if only a little."

"Interesting... What are you really thinking, though? What's in it for you if we band together?"

"As you might know, Your Majesty, the Heavenly Paradise's relations with the Gerra-Aruka Republic are also in a bad spot. They keep troops in the Dark Core Zone, waiting for the chance to attack us. We must do something."

"I see. So you want us to join hands in the face of a common enemy."

"Precisely... Well, to tell you the truth, I would rather not face them. Our country prefers avoiding needless war."

Wait. Did I hear that right?

Karla continued, "And indeed, all war is unnecessary. People hurting one another like that is barbaric, vulgar, boorish, and futile. Why do we have the ability to communicate? To boast of our military might? To vilify and revile others? No—language is for understanding one another."

No way. Is she really...?

“So we won’t launch the first attack. We want to join hands with the Mulnite Empire as deterrence to hopefully prevent Gerra-Aruka from attacking. The purpose of our alliance will not be to destroy our enemy, but to avoid war altogether. There is nothing more pointless in this world than killing.”

“You have an interesting philosophy... Though, I have a question. If you hate conflict so much, then why do you hold the title of commander?” the Empress asked.

“That’s... Well, there are some unavoidable circumstances. I don’t think everyone has the job they have because they want to.”

“RIGHT?!” I screamed.

“Wha—?” Karla blinked in surprise.

Crap. She can’t know that I don’t want to be commander. But...but man, maybe, just maybe, she might be the one person in this world who could understand me. I must observe her closely to confirm. Obseeeerve.

“I-in any case, the Heavenly Paradise wishes to form an alliance with the Mulnite Empire. Our strategy will be to deter our opponent, the Gerra-Aruka Republic, from attacking and to help each other out in case trouble arises. If they try to unlawfully engage with us, we will cooperate to destroy them.”

“But only until they make the next move, huh?”

“We would be in the wrong if we attack them outside war for entertainment.”

“I see, I understand. Well, you heard her, Komari. What do you think?”

“Bwuh?” I didn’t know what to say. “Wh-why ask me? Shouldn’t it be you making that decision?”

“Yes, normally, but I think I can leave this matter in your hands. You should start getting used to the fate of our nation depending on your choices.”

“I don’t want that responsibility!”

“Live and learn, Komari. So that’s how it is, Karla Amatsu. She’ll be taking care of the negotiations.”

“Understood.” Karla stared at me. “Ms. Gandesblood, I wanted to meet you

because I need your power. I don't know much about your character or predilections yet, but I know you have impressive might, strength that nears my level."

"You're that strong, Karla?"

"..."

There was long pause... Why?

"...So we're on a first-name basis already?"

"A-ah, sorry."

"It's fine. And yes, I am. I don't say this to brag or exaggerate. From an objective standpoint, according to general consensus, I am the strongest in the world. Yet you, too, are strong. Your Core Implosion is powerful enough to merit joining hands with you. You would make a great ally."

"Y-yeah. I am the strongest, of course."

"No, that's me. Anyway, I entreat you, won't you help me in bringing peace to the world?"

She held out her right hand to me, and the bell chimed again.

I wasn't sure. How could I be after hearing the fate of our nation hinged on my choice? Karla had a serious look on her face. Her sense of justice was strong. Though her aura was cold, I could tell she was burning with passion for world peace on the inside.

"You...really think the world would be better without war?"

"Of course. I know it's not something many people understand, though."

"I get it."

I grabbed her hand. I was a peace-and-justice-loving vampire, after all. Of course I would agree with someone saying they hated war. Even if there was a bigger conspiracy manipulating Karla from behind, I decided to believe in *her*.

"I find your ideals magnificent. Let's do this."

"Huh...? O-oh yes. Thank you."

Her bell rang twice.

So the alliance was formed. Just thinking about the gravity of my choice made my stomach hurt. But I didn't regret it. I was convinced it was the right thing to do.

"N-now, then! How about we go eat to celebrate our new friendship? I know a good omelet-rice place. It's my treat, as an apology for making you wait."

"Thank you very much, but we should draft our plans first." Karla took out an album-like book wrapped in cloth. "We have classified information related to the Gerra-Aruka Republic in here. I'd would like to share it with you now that we're allies...but please keep it confidential."

"S-sure."

"There are eight generals in Gerra-Aruka. And this is the one we must be most wary of."

Karla took out a photo of a girl. Her peach-colored hair was tied up in pigtails. The Moonpeach Princess. She was standing before a fountain, making two peace signs and beaming. I wondered in what situation the picture was taken. She looked cute, but so unlike her.

"Nelia Cunningham, the strongest Warblade in the Republic."

"She's that powerful?"

"I've never fought her directly, but I hear she's unbeatable in sports-war."

"J-just like me!"

"And me. Regardless, we must be wary of the Moonpeach Princess's actions. They say she's Madhart's loyal subject. There is no doubt that she would be the first to move if they plotted something. You can trust this intel; we got it from our ninjas."

"I see. But what kinda move do you think she'd make?"

"I don't believe she would begin by immediately starting a war. Take a look at this."

Karla placed another photo on the table. I recognized this, too. It was a big,

black tower under a clear, blue sky... Hmm. *That's the hotel Mellaconcey blew up, isn't it?*

"This is the Daydream Paradise, a resort managed by the Gerra-Aruka Republic in the Flararal region of the Dark Core Zone. The hotel includes a casino and a hot springs. It's opening this winter."

Wow, so we got invited before it even opened to the public? How fancy. And what bad luck.

"Gerra-Aruka's ministry of tourism advertises it as a *dreamlike paradise where all six races can come together in peace*, but do not be fooled. That nation of barbaric warmongers could never mean that seriously. Building a tourist attraction in the Dark Core Zone is illegal in the first place."

"Breaking the law's not good, no. They should've asked for permission."

"Indeed, building the Daydream Palace was a problem in and of itself, but that's not the biggest issue. What's alarming is that there's a Gerra-Aruka military base near it."

Karla then produced another photo. The building certainly looked like a military facility. Probably the place the Seventh Unit had attacked. I still couldn't understand how that happened.

"We don't know who controls this base, but Commander Nelia Cunningham's troops have been sighted there recently. Either way, they shouldn't need a garrison to manage a hotel. They must be plotting something. And indeed, we found that something. Our ninjas spotted a group of Warblades transporting an immense load of weapons into the Daydream Paradise."

"Weapons?"

"Most likely Divine Instruments." Karla said ominously. "As you might know, these instruments have the power to overcome the Dark Core's effects and permanently kill people. The fact they merely possess these atrocious, inhumane weapons is enough for us to tell that they're preparing for *real* war."

"...Are we sure they are Divine Instruments?"

"We can always trust our ninjas. Gerra-Aruka must be using the resort to

cover up something else; it's most definitely something harmful to us, whatever it is. I suspect they are using the Daydream Paradise as their base of operations for taking over the Dark Core Zone."

We were invited to that awfully ominous place?

That's the topmost secret of all secrets! And what a dark secret it is.

"We must prioritize investigating the Daydream Paradise. The Heavenly Paradise and Mulnite will send a joint team of scouts and bring to light the murderous weapons they hide there. Once everyone knows what they were hiding, Madhart will be publicly criticized and forced to retreat."

"So we don't destroy it?"

"Our strategy is to hold our defenses, not go on the offensive, remember? It would all be over if we provoked them and gave them a legitimate pretense to launch a counterattack."

"Ha...ha-ha-ha! Of course! What kind of idiot strikes first?! Our objective is world peace, after all!"

"Exactly. I'm glad you understand, Ms. Gandesblood."

I broke out into a cold sweat. *Did...we mess it all up royally?*

What now? If I feign ignorance, I'll get put on blast later. Maybe I could pretend it was a typhoon that destroyed the hotel?

Karla took a sip of tea, then looked intently at me.

"To be honest, the papers made you out to be a murderous barbarian. But meeting you in person now, I don't get that impression. You look like you love peace even more than I do."

I looked around. There wasn't a peeping subordinate in sight.

"Th-that's right, actually. I love peace. Everyone treats me like I'm a bloodthirsty war lover, but that's just lies. I would rather war not exist to begin with."

"I've always thought you can't judge a person's character until you directly speak to them. Yes, I think our relationship will be a good one."

“Yep! Looking forward to working with yo—”

“Commander!!”

The door slammed open. The mood in the room instantly changed.

It was the Seventh Unit’s “strategist” (according to himself), Caostel. The guy who’d almost gotten me killed many times in the past. He was holding a letter in his right hand.

“We got a message from Gerra-Aruka for the Seventh Unit. Please take a look.”

“H-hold on. I’m having a meeting with a foreign VIP. I’ll check it out later.”

“But it’s from Nelia Cunningham. She’s asking for a revenge match.”

“...Revenge?”

Karla lifted her eyebrows. I tried glossing over it in a panic.

“A-actually, I know Nelia. We played cards the other day, and she was so frustrated she lost. She’s a sore loser, y’know?”

“It sure looks like it. Our Seventh Unit basically annihilated Nelia Cunningham’s troops, so it’s only natural she would want payback. But fear not, Commander! We’ll blow her army to bits just like last time, and then she’ll accept the might of the Mulnite Empire’s Seventh Unit!”

My smile froze, as did Karla’s.

“...Ms. Gandesblood? Care to explain?”

“I-it’s just the normal kind of war. I fought Nelia the other day.”

“There’s no public record of it, though? And didn’t you say you played cards?”

“Ha-ha-ha! Oh, it’s just the circumstances are so complicated, it’s hard to put into words. But don’t worry. My maid, Vill, is a genius and will clearly summarize what happened. Please, Vill, explain. Carefully. With caution.”

“Just the other day, Lady Komari launched a surprise attack on Nelia Cunningham’s troops and obliterated them.”

“I SAID WITH CAUTION!!”

Why are you so straightforward?! I mean, you're not lying, but you're just making me sound like a berserker! My fear had become reality. I could see the veins on Karla's forehead popping. It was over.

"...Ms. Gandesblood. You were lying to me?"

"I didn't lie! Vill, please explain, thoroughly this time!"

"Understood." Vill bowed elegantly. "The other day, Lady Komari and the Seventh Unit were invited by Nelia Cunningham to the resort in the Flararal region of the Dark Core Zone. The latter's objective was to ask Lady Komari to join her plan of world conquest; the shameless rogues are plotting to plunge the world into chaos and conquer all six nations. Of course, we didn't accept such a maleficent request. Lady Komari, in righteous indignation, mobilized her troops against their military base."

"You mobilized your troops?!" Karla opened her eyes wide and stood up.

I was feeling like a scarecrow in a crop field. Powerless.

"Yes, and then she slaughtered the entire enemy army."

"She massacred them?!"

"She also blew up the Daydream Paradise hotel."

"B-blew up..."

"We then gracefully escaped from Nelia Cunningham's furious counterattack and returned to the Mulnite Empire. The end."

"..."

Karla's jaw was on the floor. Meanwhile, the Empress was sipping her tea as if nothing had happened, and Caostel was puffing up his chest in pride. I got up to go to the restroom, but the sicko maid grabbed me tightly by the shoulders and forced me back to my seat. *"Calm down,"* she whispered as she rubbed my shoulders.

Karla sat down again, too, but then trembled for a couple seconds before rising to her feet once more.

"Wh-what were you thinking?! Why did you attack first?! Was all that about

you being a pacifist a lie?!”

“It’s not a lie, I just...!”

Hold on. Caostel’s watching. I can’t tell the truth, or I’ll risk mutiny. But no, wait. If I try to lie and say I love war, then that would ruin Karla’s trust in me. Calm down, Terakomari. Yes, I simply have to state I’m a pacifist and, later on, tell Caostel that it was all to deceive the enemy. Heh. Perfect. I’m a genius.

“Calm down, Karla. I am a pacifi—”

“Excuse us, Commander!” “Is it true Aruka declared war on us?!” “Let us sortie right away!” “Hell yeah, time for some action!” “I’m so pumped I can’t stop dancing!” “Agh! My left hand is twitching!”

.....

...

I took a deep breath and looked Karla straight in the eye.

“I am a pacifist hater! There is nothing in the world I love more than slaughter!”

“I knew it!”

“No! Wait! I mean, yes! But no!”

“It said so on Six Nations News. You said you would drown the whole world in tomato juice!”

“I talked about omelet rice, but I don’t remember that! It’s all lies!”

“It’s all false, Commander?”

“Of course not! I will obviously cover the entire planet in tomato juice!”

“You’re not making any sense!”

“I know! Right, you haven’t read Nelia’s letter, have you?! Maybe she’s actually saying she forgives us! Give it to me!”

I snatched the letter from Caostel’s hand. Vill gave me a pair of scissors, and I carefully cut it open. I opened it on the table so everyone could see.

I will never forget this humiliation.

“I was a fool for hoping otherwise!”

“See?! You provoked Nelia Cunningham to engage in all-out war with Gerra-Aruka! Why else would you have received this letter overflowing with hatred?! You *want* the war!”

“Karla, please, there’s a reason for this. Let’s talk about it later in private, okay?”

“I-in private?” Karla was shocked to hear that. “What are you scheming? First, you launch a surprise attack on Nelia Cunningham, and now...”

“You want her assassinated?”

“Caostel, shut your damn mouth! No, you don’t get it.”

“No, I don’t,” Karla said coldly. “You are not the pacifist I thought you were. And setting aside what you might feel deep in your heart, there’s no denying that you attract conflict.”

“Oof...” I couldn’t say anything to that. Although in my defense, I wasn’t the trigger this time around.

Karla suddenly placed a hand over her ear. She must’ve gotten a call.

“I just received a report saying the Daydream Paradise hotel was destroyed. Now it’s confirmed. I am sorry, but the alliance is off.”

“Wh-why...? Weren’t we going to aim for world peace together?!”

“You already botched our strategy. They’ll have tightened the security around the Daydream Palace, too, so we won’t even be able to investigate properly. You could drag the Heavenly Paradise into this mess if we join hands. And above all else...I can’t work with a vampire who’s incapable of thinking things through before acting. At least now I know the Mulnite Empire is a nation of barbarians.”

Misery and despair. Why must I endure such terrible misunderstandings?

It was obvious I hated war. Karla probably felt the same as I did. Yet we couldn’t be frank with each other because of everyone around us. How could life be so unfair?

“I can’t let that one slide.”

Karla shivered. Shocked, I turned to my side.

The busty blond was smiling fearlessly as always, but there was an intimidating air about her, strong like thunder, as she stared at Karla. She was clearly incensed.

“You come here to propose an alliance, only to immediately call it off and tell us we’re barbarians? How awfully self-serving of you, envoy of the Heavenly Paradise.”

“I—I didn’t mean to...”

“Don’t be scared... Though, let’s be clear: Calling off our alliance means that you are now our enemy, doesn’t it?”

“Um, I—It doesn’t mean we’re enemies, just that we won’t join hands with you.”

“I see. Sure enough, there’s no way we would ally with someone who insults us so. Now then...you may be an ignorant, insolent child, but treating a foreign envoy roughly would be foolish—barbaric, even. But, oh, according to you, Ms. Karla Amatsu, the Mulnite Empire *is* a nation of barbarians, isn’t it? Then we shall live up to your expectations.”

I could feel the waves of anger radiating from the Empress, but I couldn’t quite parse what her roundabout statement meant. Karla, however, paled in the face at once.

“I—I see. Do not worry, though; I’ve been treated very well already. I will take my leave.”

“Oh, you’re going already? Komari...”

“Bweh? What’s up?”

“Take her out.”

Hmm? What now? You want me to show her outside?

Then Karla stood up with tremendous speed.

“W-w-w-wait! We can’t start a fight in here; it would be an international

issue. And we're outside the area of effect of the Heavenly Paradise's Dark Core. I would actually die for real."

"You're the strongest, aren't you? You don't have anything to worry about."

"I'm not worried, but I just don't want to cause a scene here..."

"This is an order, Komari. Kill this fool for insulting Mulnite."

"Huh? WHAAAT?!"

Kill? KILL HER?! What are you saying, you manic Empress?!

Now that would be barbaric! And I don't have the power to kill her in the first place!

"Let's go, Lady Komari! Murder her!"

"What are you saying?! I can't do that!"

"Go, Commander! Slaughter her!"

"All right, then, your time has come, Karla!"

I stepped forward as my subordinates wished for.

Crap. Holy shit. That's an Imperial Saber, guys. One of the strongest in all six nations. I'm a fraud! I can't defeat her! How did things end up like this?! Why do you want me to kill her out of nowhere, Empress?! We just had a slight difference in opinion!

"A-are you serious, Ms. Gandesblood?"

Karla glared at me, jaw clenched. Her knees seemed weak, but I wouldn't be fooled. It was probably a traditional fight stance of the Heavenly Paradise. The "tiger stance" or whatever.

Damn it. I just wanna run away now. But all my men are clamoring, "Komarin! Komarin!" Fleeing now would mean mutiny, so I would die instead. I'm cornered.

I guess the only thing to do is act strong and hope she gets scared!

"You know, Karla, I can kill five hundred people in five seconds."

"S-so what? I can kill five thousand people in five seconds."

What do I do, Vill? It's like it's a contest now, and I know I can't win.

“Allow me to correct myself! On top of killing five hundred in five seconds, I can activate an added effect that instantly annihilates another fifty thousand!”

“An added effect?! Such a spell doesn't... No, actually, I can use my ultimate Effulgent Magic to kill five thousand in five seconds, then an extra fifty thousand, and, on top of all that, burn the entire Mulnite Empire to ashes and kill fifty million of its inhabitants! So how many did I kill in total?!”

“I'm not doing the math! Besides, activating Effulgent Magic takes time. But with just a single touch of my fingers, I can instantly transform my enemy into tartar sauce to pour on my fried shrimp! How's that?! Scared now?! Try touching my hands!”

“I'm not scared! I won the National Murder Championship in the past, I'll have you know! Not only can I get rid of your incomprehensible spells in an instant, but I can also strike back and blow you up into tiny pieces, then mix those with wheat flour and make noodles out of you! I'll slurp you right up!”

“Are you hearing what's coming out of your mouth?! Go ahead and try it, then! Do it!”

“Ha! Right back at you! You can't kill me with just your fingers! How about *you* try touching *me*?!” Karla shouted.

“No, you touch me first!”

“No, you first!”

“No, you! ...Ah.” Someone pushed me from behind. Who else but the sicko maid?

I lost my balance and pitched forward. Right before my eyes was Karla's red face filled with anger.

“Wha...?”

The crash was so strong, I heard a *boom*. By the time I realized it, I was on top of her. I could feel and hear her breathing on my face.

My brain froze for an instant as I looked at her confused expression, but then it immediately rebooted.

Shit, I'm going to get turned into noodles! I tried peeling myself off her to avoid that fate, when...

"E-EEEEEEEP!"

"Gweh!"

...Karla suddenly pushed me away. I fell on my butt, but nothing hurt. My body wasn't flour. I glanced back at her to figure out what happened and saw her dive onto the sofa and cover herself with cushions. She was trembling. What?

"G-get away from me! I don't want to be fried shrimp!"

"What are you talking about?"

You're no shellfish. Even if I fried you, you wouldn't be fried shrimp.

The Empress sighed.

"Calm down. You're a Heavenly Paradise envoy entrusted with the fate of your nation, aren't you?"

"How can I calm down?! You're all gonna kill me! You violent—"

"Listen, Karla Amatsu. Form an alliance with the Mulnite Empire if you want to live."

"..."

Karla stayed quiet, face buried in the sofa.

Ten seconds later, she slowly got up. That was how long it took her to calm down. The graceful expression from when I'd first met her had returned to her face. Still, there was fear in her eyes—she avoided looking at me. As if I was some kind of demon. Why?

"Ahem." Karla cleared her throat. "Very well. War is abhorrent but sometimes, it cannot be avoided. And I just remembered: Even if we went to war against the entire Gerra-Aruka Republic, those Warblades are no match for the great Karla Amatsu. After all, I am the strongest in the world."

"So what's your answer?"

"I accept. The Heavenly Paradise will aid the Mulnite Empire in battle."

Thus the alliance was formed.

I didn't understand how it had come to this, but oh well, I supposed I should be glad we were one step closer to world peace...hopefully.



"GWAAAAAAAAAH! Why did this happen?!" Karla shrieked. She screamed out her soul in bed.

Foreign VIPs normally stayed the night at the Mulnite Imperial Palace, as it was the safest place for those away from the blessings of their Dark Core. To be honest, she'd wanted to teleport out of there immediately, but the frightening Empress had threateningly suggested she rest before leaving.

So the first thing Karla did when she was shown to her luxurious room was jump into bed and cry her eyes out. She wouldn't be able to take it otherwise.

"Now the Heavenly Paradise has been dragged into war, I'll die! And I won't even have to wait to fall in battle, since I will most likely get executed for not fulfilling my orders..."

The orders the Goddess of the Heavenly Paradise had given her were simple:

"Form an alliance with the Mulnite Empire so we can encircle Gerra-Aruka. But make sure Mulnite follows our strategy, else it will all be for naught."

She had failed. She should have gone home the second she heard they had attacked Gerra-Aruka already. Yet in the end, she couldn't stand up to the vampires' threats and had signed the agreement. Stamped it with the second-grade Imperial Seal. There was no turning back. There was no hope.

Karla buried her face in the pillow and wept.

Why me? I had clear plans of opening a sweets shop in the capital after graduating. I was going to develop a reputation as the greatest pâtissier in the entire Heavenly Paradise. But now my life is ruined.

"Why am I an envoy?! Why am I even a commander?!"

"Because House Amatsu is a lineage of warriors."

Someone was standing beside her bed. It was a girl clad in black: Koharu, the leader of Karla's ninja squad, Kidoshu.

“Koharu! Your poor master almost died out there! Where were you?!”

“At the Imperial Capital. These blood buns are very tasty.”

“Stop eating that stuff! I will make you all the sweet buns you’d like!”

Karla snatched the bun out of Koharu’s hand. The small ninja wasn’t happy about it, but neither was she. Koharu never ate the desserts Karla baked, yet she was more than happy to eat the food of those beasts. She just didn’t have any taste buds.

“...Lady Karla, did you form the alliance?”

“Yes, I did, in the worst way possible!” Karla ranted, making the bell on her wrist chime. “It was terrible. It was just like I feared... Terakomari Gandesblood truly is the murderous demon they make her out to be! She really wants to cover the whole world in tomato juice!”

“I like tomato juice.”

“She doesn’t mean literally. Terakomari wants to turn the world into a sea of blood. I couldn’t stop shaking! You should’ve seen those red eyes, brimming with lust for massacre! She pinned me down on the floor, and I was sure I was going to meet my end. Fortunately, I got out of there alive, but at what cost?”

Karla sighed. She had hoped Terakomari would be her one ally. Though she lacked concrete evidence, there was something about Komari’s way of speaking that reminded Karla of herself. As if she was doing her hardest to bluff. But the eyes Komari had shown when she pinned her down were those of a killer. It was clear to Karla that their connection only extended to their mutual love of peace.

“Haaah...and I thought she’d be like me.”

“A pacifist?”

“Yes. You should’ve read that manuscript.”

That manuscript the blue-haired maid had given her came to mind. She had finished reading it while waiting—the novel that Terakomari had written.

“There’s no way a murderer could write such sweet, gentle, and emotional prose. It shook me to my core. The main girl’s love triangle was outstanding...”

“Words can be deceiving.”

“Indeed. But still, I thought there was something similar between us. Terakomari is but a doll in sports-war. Not only does she not fight, but she also doesn’t even give proper orders to her subordinates. I really thought she disliked unnecessary conflict.”

“But she has an amazing Core Implosion power.”

“Agh, I—I know! I saw that during the Crimson Match.”

“She’s not a useless chump like you are.”

“I know! Stop saying that!”

Karla Amatsu was the daughter of one of the greatest families in the Heavenly Paradise.

She had been specially educated since childhood with the expectation that she would become the next head of the family and always got outstanding grades in every field...officially. Oh, it was true, for 90 percent of it, but that remaining 10 percent was not. She had no talent for combat. She was weak. A puny failure of a commander. Yet her parents had used their connections to get her the title of Imperial Blade, forcing her to work a job she wanted nothing to do with because *“the Amatsus are a family of warriors.”*

By the by, that thing about her winning the “National Murder Championship” was a lie. No such championship existed.

Screw the power of authority, Karla thought.

“Damn it all. Now I know why my brother left.”

“Uncle Kakumei?”

“Don’t call him that!”

Karla’s brother (her cousin, in reality) had also become a commander against his will. Unlike her, he actually had the power worthy of a warrior, but trying to keep up with a job he hated wore him out mentally, so one day, he just vanished. Karla’s first love had ended tragically. Or rather, it didn’t end—even now, she had feelings for him swirling around inside her. But now was not the time for romance.

“...Whatever. It’s no issue if Mulnite and Gerra-Aruka go to war. I have this.” She poked her own head as she spoke.

Koharu then poked it, too.

“So echoey. Such emptiness.”

“Emptiness can be considered a form. From my mind spring endless schemes... Gerra-Aruka will probably aim for the Mulnite Empire first. We’ll have to fight alongside them as allies, but there is no rule that says we *have* to fight alongside them.”

“????”

“See, if Mulnite asks for reinforcements, we can just say, ‘Oh, we’re busy right now,’ and ignore them.”

“...Your head truly is empty, Lady Karla.”

“Heh. A true pacifist never stops looking for ways to avoid conflict, no matter the situation. To survive in this crazy world, you need smarts and the will to never give in.”

“But we have to defeat Gerra-Aruka.”

Koharu’s tone was serious. Karla didn’t know how to respond.

She was right—Gerra-Aruka was nothing but trouble for the Heavenly Paradise. In recent years, Peace Spirits had been mysteriously disappearing near the border between the two countries. Though, there was nothing mysterious about it in reality: It was a plot by the Iron Nation. The Goddess had prophesized that Gerra-Aruka was committing injustices, so there was no doubt they were behind the disappearances. They had to be.

“I know that, Koharu. We will rescue our people.”

“The Daydream Paradise is suspicious.”

“That it is.”

Karla felt chills. She hadn’t brought up in her meeting with the Empress, but there was one more suspicious rumor regarding the resort. According to her ninja, they could hear voices coming from underground at night. They must

have been from the missing Peace Spirits, but was the Gerra-Aruka Republic truly doing something so inhumane?

Karla patted Koharu's head to distract herself from the anxiety.

"Don't worry, Koharu. I may be the weakest, but I'm no dolt. Fighting is not the only way to resist. I will do things my way."

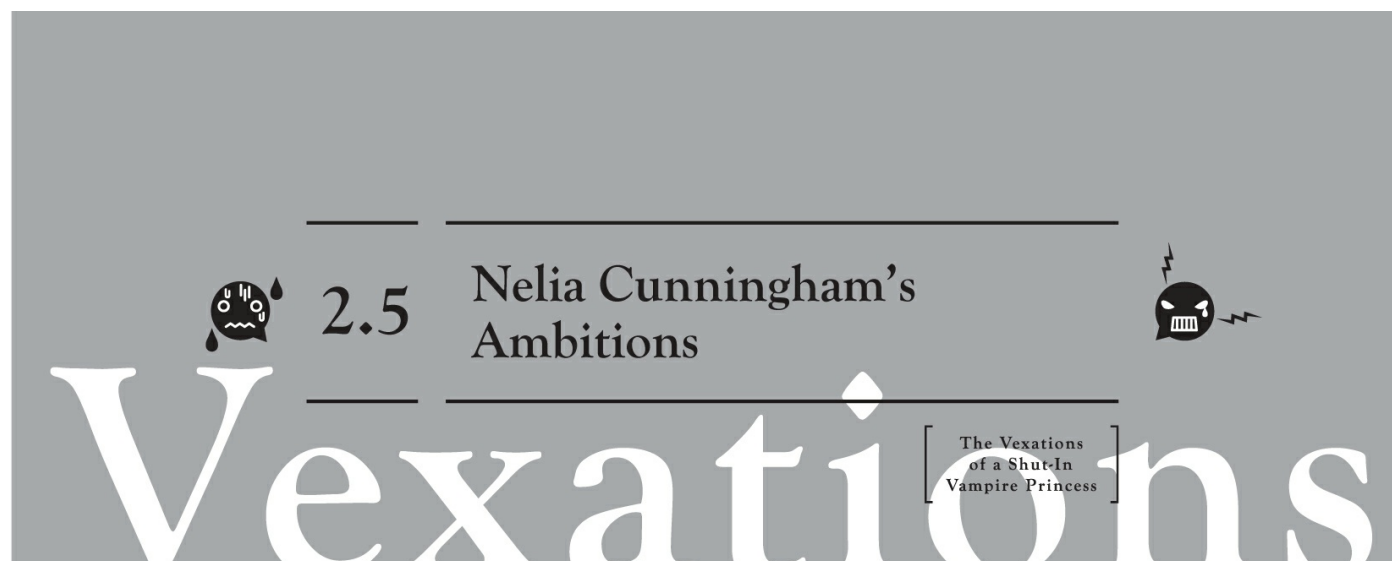
"Don't. The Goddess will get mad."

"Then let's get her mad. But first, some sightseeing before going home. I want to check out what kind of desserts they have here in Mulnite."

The bell chimed as she cheerfully smiled. Karla believed her ability to change gears and look on the bright side, no matter how bad the situation, was one of her virtues. This trait had allowed her to manage being a commander, after all. Koharu thought she was simply dumb, but whatever. Karla knew she was thinking hard about how to achieve world peace.

However, the situation was already beyond her worst nightmare. Those rowdy vampires weren't the only problem in the Mulnite Imperial Palace.

On the other side of the window, two girls were fleeing from the palace garden. A pure-white-haired girl and a cat-eared girl—journalists for Six Nations News. Their tenacious efforts had finally borne fruit. They had a scoop that would turn the world upside down.



Six Nations News, July 22nd Morning Edition

MUL-HEAVEN ALLIANCE ESTABLISHED. TROOPS MARCHING TO GERRA-ARUKA

BY THIO FLATT—IMPERIAL CAPITAL

MEIYO ARU—EASTERN CAPITAL

Mulnite Empress Karen Helvetius held a secret meeting with Commander Karla Amatsu, one of the Heavenly Paradise’s Five Imperial Sabers, on the 21st. Commander Amatsu requested the Mulnite Empire to form an alliance in order to resist the Gerra-Aruka Republic’s aggressive expansion of their territory to the Dark Core Zone. Crimson Lord Terakomari Gandesblood, alongside the top brass of the Empire, accepted and established the pact with the Heavenly Paradise, a historic first.

...

The Mul-Heaven Alliance determined that a large amount of illegal Divine Instruments have been transported to the Daydream Paradise, a resort being constructed in the Flararal region of the Dark Core Zone. The announcement of the mobilization of troops to attack is imminent. Citizens of the Gerra-Aruka Republic must take caution and be prepared for the inevitable.



The executive office of the president of the Gerra-Aruka Republic.

President Madhart’s office was busy all hours of the day, with government officials constantly coming in and out, but at this moment, it was quiet. Oppressively silent.

Seven of the Eight Illustrious Generals of the Republic were gathered in the conference room, in the Hall of Edge. They were all veteran warriors, experienced in killing countless enemy soldiers in the Dark Core Zone. Nelia sat among them gracefully as she observed her comrades.

Nelson Case, of the Second Unit. Audacious Claim, of the Third Unit. Pascal Rainsworth, of the Fourth Unit. Abercrombie, of the Fifth Unit. Mary Fragment, of the Sixth Unit. Salt Aquinas, of the Seventh Unit. The commander of the Eighth Unit was missing. Nelia had never even met them.

There was no need to remember their names or faces, however. It was a waste of time and energy.

“So. The Mulnite Empire and the Heavenly Paradise have joined hands to destroy our Daydream Paradise. ‘Deplorable’ doesn’t even cover it. Surely you all agree?” Sitting at the head of the table, President Madhart smiled.

He had summoned them on the morning of July 22. The matter at hand was, naturally, Six Nations News’ report on the Mul-Heaven Alliance. Nelia was looking forward to seeing how Madhart would respond, but in the end, he did just as she suspected: He insisted the two nations should be destroyed before they got a chance to act.

The generals all nodded in agreement. Puppets of the president, the lot of them. Poor bastards were seriously impressed by his pretentious charisma.

“Mr. President! Since they’re heading for the Daydream Paradise, please dispatch my Fourth Unit! It is our responsibility! We will crush those pesky vampires and Peace Spirits!”

So spoke a Warblade man with the face of a reptile and the aura to match—Pascal Rainsworth. He had no shame. An attention seeker far too ambitious for his status as a mere puppet.

“Rainsworth... Yes, you are its administrator, and now the place is in ruins. Do you have anything to say about that?”

“Yes... As I’ve said many times before, the responsibility this time around falls on Nelia Cunningham.”

Outrageous. Was he hearing himself?

“I was supposed to carry out the plan to assassinate Terakomari Gandesblood originally. But Nelia insisted she would take responsibility and took over my mission. She would lead Terakomari into the resort and kill her, and I would simply take her body underground. Yet she failed. Not only did she not kill her, but she also allowed her to destroy the Daydream Paradise. True, I also bear some of the fault as I was unable to stop the vampires’ attack, but I would say she is ninety percent in the wrong.”

Rainsworth went after her whenever he could. He was always looking for ways to pull her down. This time, he hadn’t even tried to rally his troops after the vampires fled. He didn’t care to because he knew all the responsibility fell on her.

“So it was not I who failed. But I will make up for her blunder by leading my soldiers against the enemy. I will kill Terakomari Gandesblood.”

“Wait, President Madhart,” Nelia said, feigning a cold tone. “I apologize for letting Terakomari Gandesblood go, but could you please give me a chance to clear my name? I will capture the vampire for sure this time.”

“Mr. President, I don’t believe Nelia has the power to do as she promises. She cannot face Terakomari Gandesblood’s Core Implosion.”

“You don’t know that. I hear Core Implosion comes from a strong spirit, and mine won’t lose against hers.”

“But, Cunningham, you don’t have your own Core Implosion, do you?”

“T-true. But I’m more prepared than anyone to give my life for the good of Aruka...”

“Ha! Aruka? That country no longer exists,” another of the Illustrious Generals said.

The others murmured in response:

“Trying to act like the tragic princess?” “Don’t forget it was her royal family who oppressed the people.” “I can’t understand why the president would make that kid a general.” “She should just own up to it and die already.”

Nelia clenched her jaw. They had no right to say any of that, not this devilish

bunch who gladly consumed the life of others...

“Forget about the princess... President Madhart, please make your decision. Give the order to deploy my Fourth Unit.”

“Mr. President! Lord Rainsworth isn’t up to the task. Let me do it,” Nelia protested.

“Calm down, you two. I plan on sending you *both* to attack.” You could cut the tension in the air with a knife. Madhart followed this up with another shocking statement. “And not *only* you both. All eight generals will dispatch their units. You will not be deployed to the Daydream Paradise to defend it; you will launch the first strike on our enemy.”

“What are you saying?! That would lead to all-out war! And not the kind for sport, but *real* war!”

“That’s precisely what I want, Cunningham. The way I see it, this world is too complacent and peaceful—it should be ruled by the law of the jungle. It is time to remind them of who’s strong.”

“Wha...?”

The generals were aghast, but soon enough, the president’s words started settling into their minds, and excitement lit up their eyes.

“Well said, Mr. President! Let us show the whole world that Gerra-Aruka is the strongest!”

“Exactly, Rainsworth. We are ready to destroy everything. Let us take this opportunity to crush Mulnite and the Heavenly Paradise. Our objective? Their Dark Cores.”

There was a commotion. Going after a foreign Dark Core? He was out of his mind.

“M-Mr. President, we can’t...,” Nelia hesitantly said.

“Don’t worry. I would never destroy them, like those terrorists think. I simply want intel on their Dark Core’s true form.”

“Y-yes! Once we get that, they won’t be able to put up a fight. They will have to become slaves to Gerra-Aruka!”

“Exactly. We will launch an assault to make the Empress and the Goddess spill the beans. So we should begin by attacking the areas of the Dark Core Zone they control.”

“Then...where do we hit first?”

“The fortress city of Faure. There’s no better location.”

The place was well-known. The city was practically a port connecting the people of the Mulnite Empire to the Dark Core Zone. Behind its walls were many portals connected to the Empire—the Gerra-Aruka forces could overwrite the teleportation permissions and create a path to freely enter and leave the Mulnite Empire.

“We will lead our entire army to Faure and declare war on the Empire once we’ve conquered the citadel. Then we will demand the Empress reveal the location of their Dark Core if they don’t want their Imperial Capital to be destroyed.”

“Ohhh...” “That’s our president!” “I never could’ve thought of that.” “What a genius.”

Nelia clicked her tongue. Were they not thinking? A nation had no bigger secret than the location of their Dark Core. Mulnite wouldn’t spill it even if Faure was conquered.

Madhart and the generals started discussing the strategy, but it all went in one ear and out the other for Nelia.

It was a disgrace that she even had to be here. Thinking about it now, Nelia realized her life had been full of ups and downs. She was born as the only daughter of the king and had received a privileged upbringing, but just five years ago, Madhart, a general at the time, rebelled and overthrew the monarchy, captured her family, and threw them into jail. Nelia had been spared as she was a child, but she swore revenge and lived these past five years carefully planning it alongside Gertrude until she finally became an Illustrious General.

Vengeance was close. So close...but she couldn’t defeat Madhart.

He managed the prison disguised as the Daydream Paradise, and there he

kept those who opposed his policies. Despite being one of the generals, Nelia wasn't allowed inside. The facility was surrounded by a barrier, and she couldn't take it down with mere physical force.

Within the prison was her father. Waiting for her.

"Komari..."

She had no choice but to bet on a foreign savior.

Nelia had ordered Gertrude to send a letter to Komari, one that described her true feelings and explained how most of what she said back at the Daydream Paradise was false. That the idiots in Gerra-Aruka were the ones really planning to take over the world. That she needed her help. Nelia was certain Komari had a kind heart and that she would help her once she read that letter.

So long as she had Komari on her side, everything would be fine. As long as she had Komari...

"Nelia, your failure is inexcusable." She lifted her head once she heard someone suddenly call her name. Pascal Rainsworth was looking down his nose at her, an eerie smile on his face. Nelia looked around in a panic and realized that the meeting had ended before she knew it. Only she, Rainsworth, and Gertrude were still there.

"...Lord Rainsworth. The meeting is already over. Shouldn't you go home?"

"Don't call me that. Don't be so cold."

Rainsworth brazenly touched her shoulders. Shivers went down her spine.

Nelia stood up by reflex and took half a step back.

"What do you want? I don't have the time."

"Ha-ha-ha! You're so cute when you're acting tough...but let's see how long you can keep up the act. A puff of wind could blow you away."

"That's none of your concern. And don't touch me with your filthy hands."

"Nelia...won't you give up on reestablishing the kingdom already?"

Her fingers trembled. She reached for her sword.

"No one wants the Aruka Kingdom back. Aristocracy is like cancer, parasites

preying on their people. No one would welcome that back.”

“It’s all the same even now. Madhart is a tyrant.”

“Are you kidding me? Your father was much more of a dictator. Everyone knows about how he was selling out his own country to the Haku-Goku Commonwealth. I’m telling you, no one wants them back.”

“I know that. I’m not aiming to reinstate the royal family. I have other methods...”

“Oh, what a shame! What a waste when you’re so pretty! The former royals spend their days in torment at the Daydream Paradise, you get that? Keep blabbering, and you’ll become a slave, too. President Madhart is cruel enough to make you one.”

“...”

“Don’t worry, though. I’ll take care of you. Just resign from being a general and live your life in peace with me. I’ll give you everything you want. Once we conquer the Empire, I will give those vampires to you as servants. You won’t have to work a day in your life again. That’s how it should be, Princess.”

“You...!!”

Nelia tried drawing her sword, but Gertrude twisted her arms behind her back to stop her. Instead, she yelled in explosive anger:

“Never! I’ll never give in to you putrid bastards! I will expose your wrongs and reform Aruka! I’ll send that Madhart packing! I will be the next president!!”

Rainsworth laughed out loud. It was all so maddening, she wanted to punch him in the face, but Gertrude wouldn’t let her move.

“Let me go, Gertrude! I’ve gotta kill him!”

“No! You will get killed if you do so!”

“Ha-ha-ha! Do your best. And once you’ve given in to your fate...I’ll be there to embrace you,” Rainsworth said.

“Scram, you piece of shit!”

Rainsworth left the room, cackling.

Nelia ground her teeth and clenched her fist. She knew the people supported Madhart...on the surface. It was all a sham. He was only keeping them in check with military might. That wasn't real peace. The flames of conflict hadn't been extinguished.

"People should act for the good of people."

That was what her mentor had taught her.

Nelia took a pendant out from her pocket. Inside was a picture, back from when she was part of the royal family. An employee of the palace had taken it. It was a photo of her as a kid and of a blond vampire woman, smiling by her side. Crimson Lord Yulinne Gandesblood.

"Mrs. Gandesblood... I won't lose."

"Lady Nelia." Gertrude looked at her with worry. "No matter what happens, I will be on your side. You can count on me whenever things get rough."

"Thanks, Gertrude. I can get back up as many times as I need with you at my side."

She patted her loyal servant's head.

Nelia had known her since she'd lost her family. Gertrude had always been by her side, encouraging her. She had to pay her back for it. She couldn't lose. She had to end Madhart's ambitions and take back her family.

"By the way, Lady Nelia...were you listening to the meeting?"

"What? That they're gonna attack? So stupid."

"There's also that, but..." Gertrude spoke as though choking back tears. "It doesn't seem like it will be a simple one-on-one this time around. The other side might also use our same strategy...and go all out."

"All out...?"

"Yes... That's terribly bad, don't you think?"

"What in the world could he be thinking...?"

Then Nelia realized—that man was seriously trying to plunge the world into chaos. Rage took over her body, and she nearly kicked away the chair.

Destroying things wasn't the right way to vent. So instead, she sprinted to the wall and yelled her lungs out the window:

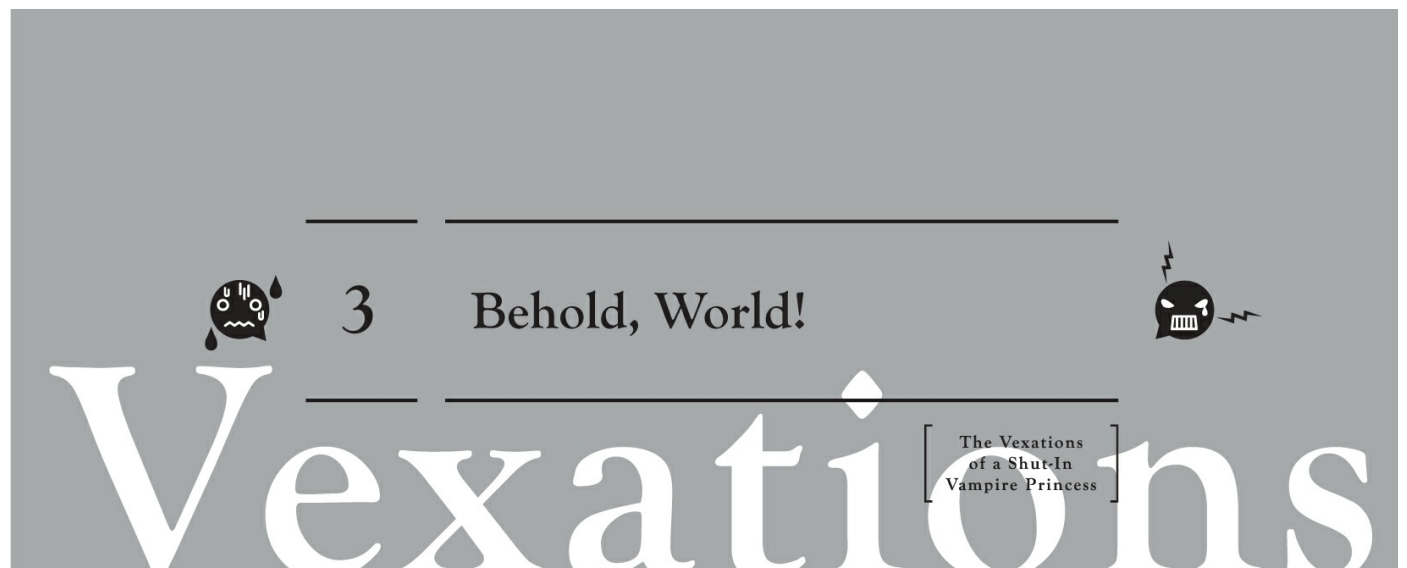
"MADHART, YOU IDIOTIC BASTARD!!"

"Stop that! He'll hear you!"

Nelia ignored Gertrude. She was only stating the truth.

Why would he take things to such an extreme? It would only bring about more death.

I have to change this country.



I felt as if too many things had happened in a short span of time. I'd hung out with Vill and Sakuna at the beach, was recruited to take over the world with Nelia, blew up an enemy base by accident, then was asked to create an alliance with the Heavenly Paradise... What a chaotic summer.

However, none of that mattered to me. Or rather, I had to pretend like it didn't, else I'd lose my mind. So I decided to spend all of today lazing around as much as I could... I was deep asleep when the sicko maid ruined it.

"Lady Komari, please wake up. It's time for work."

"WORK?! Have you lost it?! It's Sunday..."

"Let go of that stuffed dolphin; we have no time to lose. Gerra-Aruka declared war, and we have a strategy meeting. Her Majesty and the Crimson Lords are waiting for you."

"I don't care... Tell them I'm still sleeping."

"No need to tell them. They're all here."

"What are you tal...?"

I sat up, rubbing my eyes. It was Sunday! In the morning! No decent person was up so early on a Sunday. I needed to tell that noisy maid off already and...

"Huh? Am I dreaming?"

I saw familiar faces surrounding me. First, right beside me, was my maid, Villhaze. Behind her was Her Majesty. On her side was the crazy priest, Helldesus Heaven. Next to him was Flöte Mascarail, veins popping on her forehead. By her

side was the mysterious masked girl, Delphyne. Then there was an open seat, which Sakuna Memoir was next to. Then another open seat, after which were people I didn't recognize. A man in a kimono. A woman dressed similarly. Then Karla Amatsu, staring at me with a cold expression. Looking back to the front of the group, I saw the Empress ...*Huh? This has got to be a dream. Why's everyone here?*

"Since you showed no sign of waking up, I brought you, bed and all, to the meeting hall, Lady Komari."

"What were you thinking?!"

"Right back at ya, Ms. Gandesblood!" Flöte yelled, scowling at me. If this were a manga, her intense glare would come with a sound effect.

My shoulders trembled. Maybe getting humiliated at the last Crimson Council had left me a bit traumatized.

"Our meeting has begun; what are you doing sleeping on the table?! You really don't understand your position as one of the Seven Crimson Lords!"

"I—I do! I was coming up with a plan in my dreams."

"Oh, how splendid! Very well, then, let's hear it! How do we fight the enemy army right before our very eyes?!"

"Vill, please let them know of that plan I was dreaming of."

"We solve it with our fists."

"You heard her, we solve it with our fists!" I repeated.

"We wouldn't be having this meeting if it were that easy!"

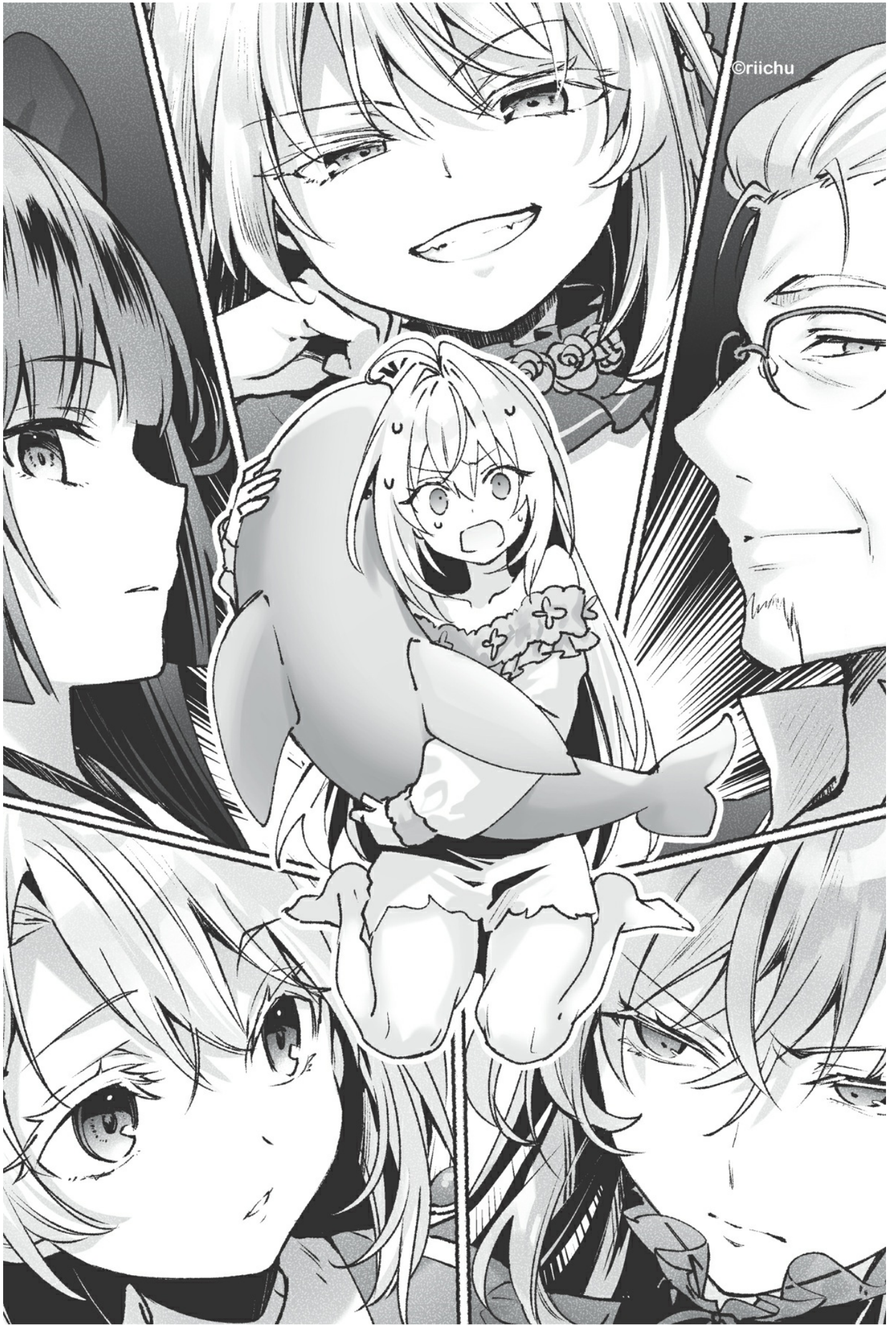
"But isn't it our job as Crimson Lords to do just that?!"

"Yes, but we need to use our heads to win this war!"

"Huh? Are we playing shogi or something?!"

"Of course not, you DOOFUS!"

"Calm down, Flöte. Komari just woke up; she doesn't know what's going on," the Empress said.



Flöte still had something to say, but in the end, she apologized and held her tongue. It was obviously me who should be apologizing, though. I was the one sleeping on the table! Of course they'd get mad! *It also doesn't help that I'm still in my pajamas! Crap, I gotta get changed...* The Empress ignored my embarrassment and explained what was going on.

"Let's go through things again. Gerra-Aruka declared war on Mulnite and the Heavenly Paradise after learning of our alliance. Not for entertainment, though. They plan on taking over the Mulnite Empire's territory in the Dark Core Zone. According to our scouts, almost all Eight Illustrious Generals have been dispatched. They want nothing but bloody, total warfare."

Hmm? Did I just hear the word 'war'? All right, time to run.

I sneaked out of my bed and got off the table, then headed straight for the door. I didn't go far before my maid grabbed me and forced me in a chair. No matter how hard I tried to stand up, her monstrous grip wouldn't let me move an inch. Then Sakuna, sitting beside me, whispered, "*Good morning.*"

"M-morning, Sakuna... By the way, what's going on?"

"Um, Her Majesty just explained it. The Gerra-Aruka Republic declared war on us, which is why we're having this emergency meeting. People from the Heavenly Paradise are here, too."

"We are in the Mulnite Imperial Palace, right?"

"We're in the fortress city of Faure, in the Metrio region of the Dark Core Zone. The castle where we fought the Crimson Match. Her Majesty says this will be the first place they'll try to attack."

What a trip I had while I was asleep!

"...So we're in the middle of the battlefield already?"

"No, the fighting hasn't begun yet... Oh, do you want a chocolate? You haven't had breakfast yet, have you? Here, say 'ah.'"

"Thanks." I bit the chocolate in her hand. So tasty. Pure bliss. "So...is this war all because of me?"

"It's not your fault, Lady Komari. Oh, do you want a chocolate? You haven't

had breakfast yet, have you? Here, say ‘ah.’”

“Thanks.” I grabbed the chocolate from Vill’s hand and threw it in my mouth. So tasty. More pure bliss. “Then why is this happening?”

Vill, pouting for some reason, said, “Gerra-Aruka was always planning on launching a campaign against Mulnite. The destruction of the Daydream Paradise hotel did end up serving as the trigger, but even if you never did that, it would’ve happened sooner or later.”

“Huh? So it *is* my fault?”

“Here, this is an excerpt of Gerra-Aruka’s statement.”

For Terakomari Gandesblood, leader of the Mul-Heaven Alliance. From the president of the Gerra-Aruka Republic.

Your alliance’s violent behavior is unacceptable. You know our country spares no effort seeking peace, and yet your army, especially Commander Terakomari Gandesblood’s Seventh Unit, does nothing but act illegally and barbarically. I have come to the conclusion that we need to use force to stop your tyranny. The Gerra-Aruka Republic hereby declares war on the Mulnite Empire and Heavenly Paradise.

“...So it is my fault.”

“Depending on how you look at it, but yes.”

“And why am I getting called the leader of the alliance?”

“There’s a picture of you and Lady Karla Amatsu together going around. It appears the Gerra-Aruka Republic wants you, specifically, dead.”

“WHAAAAAT?!”

I stood up. Vill handed me a Six Nations News (the bastards!) paper, and sure enough, there I was, merrily shaking hands with Karla. It was obvious from this I was leading the alliance!

“How did this happen?! Oh my god, there’s too much going on! Where do I even begin?! What now?! What do I do?!”

“Kill them all.”

“No way! I was going to play at the pool today!”

“Please let me accompany you when you do, but for now, you should know that everyone is staring at you.”

I gasped and looked around. It wasn't only the Crimson Lords; there were the Five Imperial Sabers there, too. I cleared my throat.

“I was going to play in a pool filled with my enemies' blood today!”

“You heard her! The leader of our alliance can't wait to massacre our foes!” said the blond, busty Empress.

I clutched my hair. Why was I the leader? I couldn't even see her face, what with my bed on top of the table and all. Won't somebody take it off?

“Well then, Gerra-Aruka might make a move soon. They plan on taking our Dark Core Zone territory, so it's almost one-hundred-percent certain that they're coming here to Faure. Why? Because if they capture it, they'll be able to freely teleport to the Mulnite Empire and even to part of the Heavenly Paradise. But we won't let them. Our alliance shall fend off their forces.”

“Lady Karen, we can't just drive them away. We must show those foul rusted how graceful and frightful Mulnite is! Shock them to the core!” Flöte exclaimed.

“Well said, Flöte. We have two objectives: first, drive them away; second, destroy *their* military base. The Heavenly Paradise would know more about this second one. Karla Amatsu, if you please.”

A bell chimed. Karla gracefully rose to her feet.

“Yes, Your Majesty. As I said while Ms. Gandesblood was asleep”—*You were already holding the meeting while I was snoozing right there? No one found that the slightest bit odd?*—“it is likely the Gerra-Aruka Republic is building an illegal military facility in the Flararal region of the Dark Core Zone under the name of the Daydream Paradise, a resort. According to our ninjas, there are signs of them transporting illicit Divine Instruments there. We must obtain proof of this and expose Gerra-Aruka to the other nations so President Madhart won't have time to wage this war.”

“It's likely they will use those Divine Instruments in this conflict, correct?”

Helldesus asked. "If they're doing things the shady way, then we shall put our all into it, too."

"No, there's no chance of that happening. Divine Instruments are a double-edged sword—you can easily destroy yourselves with them if you aren't careful. And if we plucked one from Gerra-Aruka, we could aim its power back at them. Using them in battle is simply too much of a risk. Divine Instruments are best used for specific situations, such as assassinations."

"I see! Still, I think we should expect the worse."

Karla frowned. Helldesus was right—we had to be careful of any weapon the enemy might hold.

"I-in any case, to fulfill both of our objectives, we should divide our eight commanders into two groups."

I casually looked around. There were only eight people present, excluding Vill and the Empress. *Seven Crimson Lords and Five Imperial Sabers, though... Seven plus five equals twelve, right? Oh, but we're down a Crimson Lord.*

Vill explained, "Two of the Five Imperial Sabers are absent. The Heavenly Paradise always makes sure to keep two of them stationed to guard their country."

"Oh. And why are there only five of us?"

"Petrose Calamaria of the First Unit is already fighting of her own accord. As for the Fifth Unit...the position Odilon Metal left is still open."

Oh, makes sense. Wait. No, it doesn't. Why's Petrose already fighting? Shouldn't she be here?

The bell chimed. Karla shook her arm to get everyone's attention.

"There will be a defense group to fight against the invading Gerra-Aruka army, and an offense group to launch an assault on the Daydream Paradise. It would be more effective to split our forces like this. Do you agree, Ms. Gandesblood?"

"Huh? Why ask me?"

"You are the alliance's leader."

“...How about you take the role instead, Karla?”

“The enemy thinks you’re in charge, so there’s no point in changing that. Oh, how regrettable—yes, if only I, the strongest, were the leader. A shame.”

“Ugh...”

I can't keep up with this crap. But I can't throw one of my trademark hissy fits, lest Flöte starts yelling at me again. Guess I gotta deal with it!

“So, Ms. Gandesblood, we will divide ourselves into groups, agreed?”

“Y-yeah... Hey, Vill, which one’s worse?”

“The offense team, for sure. In the defense group, you could stay here on your throne in the castle while giving out instructions to your subordinates, but that won’t be the case in the other group. You would have to lead your men at the front lines and make your way through the enemy forces, though succeeding in destroying the enemy base would earn you a greater amount of glory.”

To hell with glory. I want safety. All right, Seventh Unit on the defense team. I'll stay inside in this castle, snacking. Yeah, there won't be any fighting that way.

“Okay, then as the leader, I get to chose who’s on each team, right? First, I’ll...”

“No, we’ve already divided the groups.” I heard the Empress’s voice from the other side of my bed. “After all, this is an important fight that will decide the fate of our country. I had to make the call myself. Helldesus, please make the announcement.”

“As you wish.”

The Empress gave Helldesus a piece of paper. He stood up and read it aloud.

“I will announce the teams on the behalf of Her Majesty. Beginning with the defense group: Commander Homura Yamatera of the First Unit and Commander Karin Reigetsu of the Third Unit of the Heavenly Paradise; as well as Commander Helldesus Heaven of the Second Unit and Commander Flöte Mascarail of the Third Unit of the Mulnite Empire. That’s all.”

Bwuh? Over? No more commanders in the defense team?

“Now, for the offense team: Commander Karla Amatsu of the Fifth Unit of the Heavenly Paradise; as well as Commander Delphyne of the Fourth Unit, Commander Sakuna Memoir of the Sixth Unit, and Commander Terakomari Gandesblood of the Seventh Unit of the Mulnite Empire.”

“Hold u—,” I said.

“Wai—,” Karla said.

But then someone loudly hit the table. We both froze in place. It was Flöte. The Black Flash was staring at the Empress in dissatisfaction.

“Please wait, Lady Karen!! What do you mean I’m to be on defense?!”

She yelled so loudly that Sakuna almost fell from her chair out of sheer shock.

“Calm down,” the Empress said with absolute tranquility, staring back at Flöte. “We need both strength and speed to attack. Your Third Unit is more the technical type, isn’t it?”

“I am the combative type!!”

That much is obvious, but who says that about themselves?

“Please think it over, Lady Karen. If you say power is needed for the attack team, then it is a mistake to choose Terakomari Gandesblood for the job. She can’t even hold a sword!”

“Th-that’s not true! There’s no vampire out there with as much strength as me! But if you insist, then I would gladly give over the—”

“Wait!” Karla said, making her bell chime. “My unit excels more at technique and strategy than fighting. It is not fit for the offense team. I could change places with Ms. Mascarail.”

“Hmm? But, Karla Amatsu, you boasted so loudly about being stronger than Komari,” the Empress said.

“Y-yes, I am much more powerful, but this is not the time for me to—”

“Ms. Karla Amatsu is perfectly worthy of being in that group! But I cannot accept Ms. Gandesblood being on it! We cannot leave such an important task to

her!”

“No, Ms. Mascarail, I am perfectly fine being on the defense...,” Karla said.

“You’re right! Karla is perfect for the offense group! So I will give up my spot to you, Flöte! The strong should give a chance for others to shine from time to time,” I said.

“No, Ms. Gandesblood, you don’t need to do tha—”

“Give a CHANCE for OTHERS to SHINE?!”

Oh crap. I said too much.

“What are you mad about, Lady Mascarail? Lady Komari is so gracefully giving you the opportunity. You should be grateful in accepting this handover!”

“Stop it, Vill! I’ll give you some candy, so shut your mouth!”

“You... Can you ever NOT be rude?! I can’t stand that haughty look of yours! Worst of it all, the whole thing’s a bluff! Every second that passes with you as a Crimson Lord is another second of disgrace for our Empire!” Flöte shouted.

“I’m just trying to be considerate!”

“Keep your ‘consideration’ to yourself! Why must you always be like this?! This is just like in the Crimson Match! I hear you supposedly demolished a terrorist base to the ground with Effulgent Magic, but I know that simply cannot be true! You bought Six Nations News out to write that for your own benefit! Admit it!”

“WHAT?! Even my patience has its limits! How in the world does that benefit me?! Why would I ever want to buy that crappy newspaper out?! No, you know what? I would LOVE to do just that! Pay them to revise those articles!” I retorted.

“Please don’t argue! If we could just take a step back and look at this data that shows how my Amatsu Unit is a much better fit for defense...”

“Revise them even further?! Is all that falsification not enough for you already?!”

“I’ve had more than enough of them! And I haven’t falsified anything!”

“Don’t ignore me...please...,” Karla mumbled.

“Then how do you explain all those articles?!”

“They’re all made-up! By them! Why do you believe Six Nations News?!”

“What reason do they have to make things up on their own?! There is no way you caused that disaster! It must’ve been a force of nature! A meteorite or something!”

“Yes! That’s what I would like them to report it as!”

“So you want them to say you’re so powerful, you can manipulate meteorites?!”

“Why are you so freaking DENSE?! NO!!”

“...*Sniff, sniff,*” Karla wept.

Sakuna was the first to notice. She was a millisecond faster perceiving the spell, as someone partly of the same Sapphire race. I was too wrapped up in my argument with Flöte, and all the other commanders never could’ve imagined that we’d be attacked right that moment.

Sakuna pulled my arm.

“Huh?” I exclaimed, but no one heard.

A meteorite fell down on us out of nowhere.

Or at least, the shock wave was so strong that it sure felt like it. The ceiling broke apart, and a ball of fire struck down on my bed, blowing it up. A scorching whirlwind passed through the room before I could even scream, but right then, a familiar maid outfit covered my entire sight.

The mana noisily warped the air around as Flöte activated her dark magic. Her black hole eradicated the flames, shock wave and all.

I could do nothing but bury my head in the sicko maid’s chest.

What is going on?

Soon, sound returned. Someone entered the hall in a hurry.

“Your Majesty! The Haku-Goku Commonwealth’s army is here! They’ve joined

hands with Gerra-Aruka!”

I squirmed my way out my maid’s arms to look around.

The entire hall was charred black. My bed was now ashes. The dolphin pillow Daddy had bought for me was nowhere to be found.

The commanders all had looks of shame on their faces as they crouched by the walls. Fortunately, none of them were injured—they’d managed to protect themselves. But...

“Vill! Are you okay?!”

“I’m fine. Are you uninjured, Lady Komari?”

“Y-yeah... But this ain’t good.”

Noise outside. Yells and shrieks. Faure was effectively under control of the Mulnite Empire, but this was the Dark Core Zone. There were people from all nations here—not only vampires, but also Warblades and Sapphires as well. But who could’ve guessed they would attack us like this?

Helldesus and Flöte left the hall, and the other commanders followed. I guessed they’d be heading to lead their troops against the Haku-Goku Commonwealth.

“Your Majesty! We have a call from Gerra-Aruka!” The Empress’s bodyguard said.

She stood at the center of the charred room, her expression cold as ice. She took out the Correspondence Crystal from her pocket.

“Good day, Your Majesty.” A man spoke; she had put the call on speaker. *“As I’ve already told the Goddess of the Heavenly Paradise, I’ve mobilized my troops in the name of justice. You dared disturb the peace between the six nations, and it’s time for you to pay.”*

I then realized that was the top dog of Gerra-Aruka: Madhart.

“Pay? Oh, payback for us attacking your territory?”

“This isn’t about retaliation; it’s about peace. You froze over part of our territory. You destroyed the facilities we were constructing in the name of

friendship among nations. Your acts have been nothing but vile.”

“We were justified in attacking both of those places.”

“Your savagery doesn’t stop at physical assault. Your words are disturbing world peace, too. One of your Crimson Lords talks about conquering the globe, bringing terror to the hearts of the people; her statements can even be interpreted as an attack on the economy, what with how they suddenly increased the demand for omelets and raised the price of eggs. Not to mention the discriminatory remarks against chimpanzees, which are giving rise to widespread bigotry.”

“I seriously cannot understand half the things you’re saying.”

“And that’s not all. You are all under suspicion of having ties to Inverse Moon. Odilon Metal, one of your Crimson Lords, was part of the terrorist organization’s management. And Sakuna Memoir, also one of its members, continues to serve as a commander without serious repercussions. We cannot stand by and let your dangerous nation do as it pleases. We have come to the conclusion that we must take matters into our own hands.”

“Do you really think you can do that?”

“I’ve already communicated it to the other nations. Both the Haku-Goku Commonwealth and the Lapelico Kingdom were quite open to our proposal. The Enchanted Lands haven’t answered back, but I’m sure they’ll support us. Which means that you, Mulnite Empire and Heavenly Paradise, have turned the four nations against you.”

“I see. What’s your objective, then?”

“Conquering the Mulnite mainland.”

The Empress’s expression turned even colder. Her eyes gleamed.

“But jumping straight to that would be too cruel, I believe. So here’s a proposal. Tell us about the true form of Mulnite’s Dark Core, and we will spare Faure, for starters.”

“Unbelievable. You seriously thought I’d talk?”

“The Empire will be turned to ashes if you don’t. This is no negotiation. It’s a

threat. You may have Mulnite's and the Heavenly Paradise's elite assembled there, but you can't possibly stand up against the forces of four nations. It is in your best interest to accept defeat now and follow our orders."

"Ridiculous." She sighed. "You speak as though you've cornered Mulnite...but you're no threat."

"What?"

"A ragtag, makeshift army poses no danger to my country. You ought to be a tad more realistic."

"Ha... Enough of your bravado."

"Are you here right now? Or are you still at your executive office?"

"Why does that matter? Listen, you've got two choices only. Either you give in and tell me where your Dark Core is, or you accept annihilation at the hands of our troops."

Totally ignoring him, the Empress took out a second Crystal from her pocket. She poured in a thunder-like bit of mana, and the call was picked up immediately.

"Petrose, blow him up," she said without hesitation.

"Blow up whom? Do you have any intention of listening to what I'm—?"

Beep. The call was cut off. And it wasn't the Empress who hung up.

What in the world is going on? The Empress then put away both Crystals and turned to me, a splendid smile on her face.

"Did you hear that, everyone?! Gerra-Aruka plans to conquer Mulnite and the Heavenly Paradise! We can't let them get away with it. It is Mulnite tradition to kill anyone who dares treat us with contempt."

"W-wait, please!" Karla exclaimed in a hurry; her hair was up in a cone shape because of the blast earlier. "We can't take on four nations! We should be negotiating peace with Gerra—"

"Proposing peace is basically accepting defeat. Besides, we can win this war. Aren't you the strongest of all, Karla Amatsu? What do you fear?"

“Huh? We can win...?”

“I know not of Gerra-Aruka’s internal affairs, but the heads of the Haku-Goku Commonwealth and the Enchanted Lands are not as moronic as Madhart. We can take advantage of some things...and for that, we must first expose the truth behind the Daydream Paradise, just as we were already planning to.”

“What...is there in the Daydream Paradise?”

“That thing about the Peace Spirits disappearances... I have no proof, but I believe we’ll find something of relation to your country as well.”

Karla raised her eyebrows, then her eyes turned cold, grim...but it was hard to take her seriously with that conelike hairstyle of hers. She took notice of this right away and tried combing it.

The Empress glanced at the remaining commanders. She shot a haughty stare, befitting of her title, at each of them, one after the other. Then in an overly dramatic tone, she gave her decisive order:

“Delphyne, Sakuna, Karla Amatsu, Komari. All of you head for the Daydream Paradise in the Flararal region. This will be our first, significant move in destroying Gerra-Aruka.”

Delphyne froze in place.

Sakuna grabbed the hem of my clothes with a nervous expression.

I looked away from reality and filled my head with tasty omelets.

Karla was desperately trying to comb her hair, her face beet-red.

“Don’t worry. The defense team will take care of the enemies invading here. Go on, heroes! Crush the ambitions of that atrocious republic!”

War. A non-entertainment war had finally begun.

What about my bed? I have no place to sleep tonight now. Will Daddy buy me a new one? Will I even get to go home tonight?

Waves of despair washed over me.



In this day and age, people didn’t go on days-long exhibitions. There were

portals managed by the six nations all around the Dark Core Zone. One could easily reach them through teleportation.

The Gerra-Aruka Republic's First Unit, led by Nelia Cunningham, was in Mulnite territory inside the Dark Core Zone under orders of President Madhart. Nelia's job was to attack and conquer the city. Launch a fierce assault to make the Mulnite Empire and the Heavenly Paradise give up the location of their Dark Cores. An exceedingly naive plan.

Just. Stupid, Nelia thought.

"Lady Nelia! Look, there's the fortress city of Faure!" Gertrude exclaimed.

Beyond the grassland was the citadel, with smoke rising here and there. The reports said the Haku-Goku Commonwealth had already set fire to it. How vexing.

"So the other countries are really attacking the Mul-Heaven Alliance already. How did he even get them to join us?"

"No idea... Perhaps he promised them money or land?" her maid responded.

Nelia was there in enemy territory as a commander of Gerra-Aruka, but she saw no meaning in fighting. What was the point of obeying Madhart and waging unlawful war? Wouldn't it be better to just ignore his orders? But she couldn't go against the president. She was one of the Eight Illustrious Generals, so she had to follow his instructions.

"Lady Nelia, what shall we do? Do we attack as well?"

"Of course we do!" answered the reptilian Warblade, wearing a Gerra-Arukan military uniform, in her place. Pascal Rainsworth, another Illustrious General.

Out of all eight military units of the Gerra-Aruka Republic, only the two of had been sent here.

"The prime minsiter instructed us to attack Faure. The Mulnite Empire won't be able to put up a fight after we take over that castle, and soon enough, the Dark Cores of both vampires and Peace Spirits will be ours."

"You think they'll speak? Neither the Mulnite Empire nor the Heavenly Paradise are that stupid. Unlike Madhart."

“You wouldn’t understand his genius. Look, the Haku-Goku Commonwealth has begun its attack. Let’s not dawdle any longer.”

According to Gertrude, the entire armies of both enemy countries were gathered at Faure—along with the Third Unit of the Haku-Goku Commonwealth, the Second Unit of the Lapelico Kingdom, and of course, her own unit. A fierce battle would surely ensue.

Rainsworth gestured with his arm to give the order, and the military Warblades headed slowly for the enemy’s location. Nelia had no qualms about killing, so long as it was out of her own volition; having to wield her sword as a pawn in Madhart’s invasion plans enraged her to no end. In order for him to win the next election, the Illustrious Generals had to show success...

“Lady Nelia, I-look! Over there!”

She glanced in the direction Gertrude was pointing.

People were streaming out the rear gate of the fortress city. The fluttering flag meant they were not civilians, but rather the troops of the Heavenly Paradise and the Mulnite Empire. Leading the group were the young commanders who had risen in popularity throughout the six nations as of late: Karla Amatsu and Terakomari Gandesblood.

Nelia felt as though the clouds in her mind were clearing up. She hoped that the vampire could understand her. Maybe Komari, having inherited the will of Nelia’s mentor, could find a way out of this dire situation.

“Koma—”

“Terakomari Gandesblood! Off with her head! Then capture her alive!” Rainsworth yelled, and the Warblades responded in kind as they launched their assault.

Nelia frowned. That man really only ever got in her way.

“Let us go, too! We must capture Komari, whatever it takes!”

☆ (Let’s go back in time a bit)

I somehow ended up on the “offense” team.

No word could’ve been further away from my personality, but I suppose it

wasn't that bad this time around. The defense team seemed to be in for an even tougher job.

"Hey, Vill! Flöte's unit's getting attacked! You think they'll be all right?"

"I guess we'll see. Despite how wretched Flöte Mascarail may be, she is a Crimson Lord. Though look at it from another angle, and she is just a wretched Crimson Lord."

"So what do you mean, then?!"

Suddenly, a huge explosion erupted behind us. I instinctively screamed and ducked.

Vill was carrying me bridal-style as she sprinted at max speed. My Seventh Unit had teleported into Faure as well and were eager to fight.

The offense team's objective was to destroy the enemy's military base, and in order to do that, we had to get out of the fortress city first.

"Damn it...the city's getting blown to bits! They're out of their minds!"

Explosion after explosion went off behind us like crazy. The Haku-Goku Commonwealth's army had forced themselves inside the gates.

"Wah-ha-ha-ha! Good day, chumps! It is I, the strongest of the Six Arctic Masters of the Haku-Goku Commonwealth! Commander Prohellya Butchersky! Charge, my beloved Sapphires! Tear those pigs to shreds!"

A girl gave commands in an overly enthusiastic tone as she levitated in midair, and the men in white military uniforms did as instructed. They set fire to the buildings about them like beasts. I could not believe Sakuna was (a quarter) related to those people.

Meanwhile, Helldesus's troops evacuated the civilians, teleporting them to the Mulnite mainland. I pitied them, as their city would be destroyed by this senseless conflict...but then I noticed they were cheering. They were waving their hands out the windows and jumping in excitement.

"What...in the world are they happy about?"

"People who live in the Dark Core Zone tend to be the greatest war enthusiasts. They must be excited to get to see slaughter before their very

eyes.”

So they’re messed up in the head. Got it. I’d be crying if that were me. In fact, I already wept back there when they burned down my bed. I really loved that dolphin pillow... You won’t get away with this, Haku-Goku Commonwealth! Although, wouldn’t this be that sicko maid’s fault? For bringing my bed onto the freaking battlefield?

“Lady Komari, there is no time to weep over what was lost. We’ll receive reparations once we win the war, so we can buy it all back then!”

“What if we lose?!”

“We’d never lose,” said the masked Crimson Lord running beside Vill—Delphyne. She (?) spoke monotonously, with no emotion. “As much as it pains me to admit, those nations can’t stand up against your power. Those rusted are as good as dead. Annoying, but true.”

What? Don’t scare me.

“Use that power if need be. I’ll lend you my aid.”

“Cool. Yeah. That power.”

“Yes. That.”

What power?! But I couldn’t bring myself to ask. I heard she had mysteriously died by explosion during the Crimson Match, so maybe her memories were all jumbled up from that.

“Look ahead!” Karla, sitting in a palanquin carried by her subordinates, pointed ahead.

I looked, and there were *actual* beasts charging in through the back gate. A troop of beast-folk from the Lapelico Kingdom. They were also here to strike!

“Th-those are...giraffes!” Sakuna shrieked.

The beasts noticed us and let out a battle cry as they headed in our direction. Most of them were giraffes indeed. They swung their long necks and smashed the buildings with their heads as they approached—the vivid image of an apocalypse. *Seriously what the fudge?!*

“That’s Lieutenant General Neckson McLongo—the Lapelico Kingdom’s Second Unit. They lack rationality and will continue destroying everything in their way until their necks snap.”

“Why?! What now?! We’re gonna run into them at this rate!”

“Turn right! Then another right! Let’s go back home and have some snacks; I’ve got sweet bean jelly!” Karla said.

“No need! Special-grade coagulation spell—*Infinite Dripping!*”

Delphyne slashed her wrist with a knife, and the spurting blood turned into a whip that she used to mow down the giraffes. Her soldiers followed their masked leader and shot spell after spell, but it wasn’t enough to fully contain the enemy. The giraffes kept on shaking the earth as they ran toward us.



“Commander! Leave it to us!” “We can’t let that masked bastard take all the glory!” “You’re finished, giraffe scum!” “We’re feasting on giraffe meat tonight!”

My Seventh Unit guys launched forward. No point trying to stop them. They clashed with the giraffe army, and blood and dust and mana swirled all around in an explosive fashion. The battle before my eyes didn’t seem real. A stray shot flew past me and blew up a souvenir shop right behind.

“Ugh! Obstinate giraffes!” Delphyne exclaimed.

Sakuna also ordered her troops to attack, while Karla cried to her ninja girl to flee, for whatever reason.

I...was already preparing to run home.

“It’s all up to you, my trusty maid!”

“You’ll get blown up if you leave your post now.”

“I’ll get blown up either way! Look at that! I didn’t know giraffes were that violent! I can’t go look at them at the zoo anymore! I’m traumatized now!”

“I figured you’d say that, so I’ve got a plan. Please press this button.”

Vill held out a mystery switch. Nothing good could come out of pressing it.

“What is this?”

“Just press it.”

So I did.

A huge explosion went off.

It felt as if the planet itself was blowing up. Right before my eyes, the ground where the giraffes and the Seventh Unit were clashing erupted. The blast sent rubble, weapon shards, and someone’s lower body flying my way, just barely brushing my cheeks. It then rained down on the Masked Unit behind me. Delphyne and Sakuna were shocked, and Karla even fell off her palanquin, face hitting the ground. Dust clogged the air. Everything went silent. What in the world?

All the giraffes were dead, as were some of my vampires. Yohann among

them.

“...Wha—? What happened?”

“Land mines.”

“Why are there land mines here?”

“I planted them.”

“WHAT?!”

“Last night, I went to Lady Memoir’s house and let her suck my blood. *Pandora’s Poison* showed they would attack us from the rear gate, so I came prepared.”

“You just killed our guys, too, though?! And you let Sakuna suck your blood again?!”

“No need to worry about either issue. Now, we must go!”

“Bwuh? Wait!”

Vill carried me again and ran off. She jumped over the corpses as she headed for the gate. Sakuna and Delphyne finally came to and followed us over the charred giraffes and vampire bodies. *That must be at least two hundred of our guys dead... Wait a second! We haven’t even reached the enemy base!*

There was no time to protest, however.

We exited the citadel from the rear gate to the vast grassland. Then I remembered. This was the place we always teleported to when going to war. How come I hadn’t noticed until now?

“Lady Komari! The Mulnite Imperial Army’s Fourth Unit, the Sixth Unit, the Seventh Unit, and the Heavenly Paradise’s Fifth Unit—a total of two thousand people have escaped the castle. It is time to teleport,” Vill said as she took a shiny stone out of her pocket.

It was a Magic Stone that had been infused with a mass teleportation spell for military use. A single one cost five million mells. They used them every time a war was held. Absolute insanity. That money would be way better invested in environmental organizations.

“Hold on, where are we warping to?!”

“The closest portal to the Daydream Paradise, obviously.”

“W-wait, Ms. Komari! There’s a new enemy here!”

What now?! I turned around and almost fainted. A tremendously large army was heading for us from the horizon. Not giraffes this time, but Warblades clad in the Gerra-Aruka Republic’s uniform. They were definitely aiming for me specifically.

“Vill, we gotta run! Teleport us already!”

“Mass teleportation takes time. It’s quite likely we could get chopped up before it happens, and then only half our bodies will be teleported.”

“What’s the point, then?!”

“L-look!” Karla screamed. *There’s blood coming out your nose. Are you okay?* “That’s President Madhart’s confidant, Pascal Rainsworth! And the strongest of the Eight Illustrious Generals, Nelia Cunningham! We’ll be eradicated! We must run!”

Huh? Nelia? Taken by surprise, I looked farther into the distance, but by then, the battle had already begun. My Seventh Unit men were yelling like demons, charging against the enemy. Though I was their commander, they didn’t even stop to care about what I had to say.

“Hey! Take it easy, gu—”

“Kill Terakomari Gandesblood!” yelled the man at the front, the guy Karla said was called Rainsworth. His eyes were weirdly reptilian-like.

The Gerra-Aruka army fired at us, except their magic didn’t hit my troops, but Sakuna’s. Her vampires were blasted away and launched like dandelion fluff. Corpses fell right before my eyes. I almost wet myself.

“Lady Sakuna! Let’s move!”

“Bwuh? O-okay, got it! Everyone, attack!”

The Sixth Unit shouted in reaction to the order. Delphyne’s troops also silently advanced forward. They gripped swords imbued with mana as they charged,

and spells flew all over the meadow, explosions erupting, blood, arms, and screams flying.

Suddenly, a large ball dropped right in front of me.

“That’s a bomb, Lady Komari!”

“Wuh? WHA—?!”

Vill tackled me from out of nowhere, and we fell and rolled on the grass. A blast went off, piercing my ears as it annihilated the spot I’d just been standing on. I stared, my mouth agape. Tears welled up in my eyes from the blast.

I couldn’t take it anymore. I hugged my maid tight and screamed:

“No more please! I wanna go home, take me home, let’s go home! Why should I have to die like this?! What did I do?!”

“You did nothing, but that’s just how war is.”

“Well, I freaking hate the guy who invented war! Stupid asshole! And that lunatic Madhart, too! Idiots, all of them!”

“I heard that.”

It felt like needles piercing my skin all over. The enemy commander—Rainsworth—had caught up to us before I knew it. The Warblade looked down at me, flames of hatred raging in his eyes.

“You dare insult our president? You lowly vampire.”

“—!” I pushed Vill away and stood up. “Y-yes! He’s an imbecile! I could maybe understand wanting to wage war for entertainment—I mean, not really—but either way, I just don’t get why you would do *this*! The world sucks because of sick bastards like you!”

“Pfft... Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! At least you don’t hold your tongue, girl!”

His shrill cackling was irritating. The endless screams, explosions, and yells around us were grating as well. All proof that the person behind this conflict was nothing but stupid.

Rainsworth glared at me as he said, “Madsworth’s a hero. A genius capable of taking over the world. You, little girl, have no right to talk down to him. And it’s

not our style to let this sort of thing slide, so...I'll have to dispose of you."

"J-just try! I'm the strongest vampire! I won't lose to anyone!"

"*Pfft.*" Rainsworth burst into laughter again; his sneering gaze hurt. "The strongest vampire? You're just a baby!"

"What...?"

"I can't waste any more time on idle chatter, Gandesblood. But let me say this: no vampire can defeat a Warblade. That's just scientific truth. There are six races in this world, and thus six nations. Everyone acts as though we're all equals, but that couldn't be any more wrong. There is but one superior race, and that's us Warblades. All the rest are trash."

What's he talking about? Is he serious?

"We have iron bodies and superior offensive skills, on top of the ability to freely manipulate blades. We are the ideal creation. You vampires, on the other hand, are vulgar creatures who can only think of drinking blood."

"..."

"Perhaps you're the best of your scummy kind, but that doesn't change the fact that you're scum. You cannot defeat me, no matter how hard you try."

"..."

"Bwa-ha-ha! Gerra-Aruka will soon control the Mulnite Empire. All the vampires will become slaves for us. That's your place! And yes, you too. I'll kill you and make you my slave. Your looks are good, if nothing else. You'll make a great trophy to brag about."

"You..."

I was sad. Not only was he putting down everyone around me with nasty slander, but he also outright went against my and Karla's very ideals—he was declaring war on our wish for world peace. That gave me a glimpse into the current Gerra-Arukan government's values.

They really didn't think of anyone but themselves.

"Go ahead and give it a try," I said, looking Rainsworth straight in the eye.

“I’m actually the weakest vampire, but I still won’t lose to you.”

“Wow...now that is ridiculous. What can a lowly vampire like you even do?”

Then I saw the glimmer of a blade. Vill, who had been standing in silence beside me, had thrown a kunai, which was going straight for Rainsworth’s neck...but he struck it down with his sword at the last moment.

He held his blade aloft with the same movement and then slashed at me.

An ax swooped in from my side to block it. Bellius Hund Cerbero.

“Commander! Are you unhurt?!”

“Y-yes! I’m fine.”

“What’s this beast-man doing here?!”

Bellius’s sudden appearance managed to confuse Rainsworth for a moment. The beast-folk were supposed to be on his side after all.

Many things happened one after the other after that.

Rainsworth immediately composed himself and jumped back and away.

Bellius and Vill went after him.

I was left all alone. Caostel, despite calling himself my strategist, was leading my troops. Mellaconcey was who knows where, and Yohann was dead.

So a peach-colored whirlwind took the chance and crossed the whole grassland.

I felt someone standing right beside me.

“Komari. We finally meet again.”

I looked up in shock. The girl with peach-colored pigtails, armed with twin blades, was staring down at me. The Moonpeach Princess. Nelia Cunningham.

Everyone nearby turned to look at her.

Vill came back to me in a hurry. Even Rainsworth seemed flustered about her appearance. Nelia ignored him, however, as she took a Magic Stone out of her pocket. She held it out to me and put on a bold smile.

“It’s hard to talk here. Let’s go somewhere else, okay?”

Oh, this isn't good.

Then light burst forth from the Stone and covered my entire field of vision.



A bloody battle was being fought both inside and outside the fortress city of Faure.

Another troop of the Haku-Goku Commonwealth had joined the engagement, too, turning the intensity dial further up.

Amid it all, the commander of the Fourth Unit of the Gerra-Aruka Republic, Pascal Rainsworth, held his long sword in hand as he stood in place. Shocked.

“They escaped... Nelia betrayed us...”

Rainsworth's main objective was to take over Faure, but he also had to capture Terakomari Gandesblood. She was the leader of the Mul-Heaven Alliance, and not only that—Rainsworth also suspected she was at the heart of the entire Mulnite Empire's actions. If only he could get rid of that cocky vampire, their victory would be assured.

But there was one more reason Rainsworth obsessed over Gandesblood. It was because of Nelia. She seemed to see hope in that girl.

“These vampires just keep getting in my way...”

There was no way Terakomari Gandesblood had the power to defeat Madhart, but just having the ability to give Nelia her energy back was more than enough trouble. He needed her to stay submerged in despair, so that once she could do nothing more by herself, he could gently reach out to her. That way, even her heart of steel could melt away...

“Lord Rainsworth! The Haku-Goku Commonwealth's reinforcements have arrived! Shall we head into Faure as well?!”

“No... Let's follow Terakomari Gandesblood.” Rainsworth glanced at the battlefield.

Nelia's First Unit, though confused, kept on fighting, even though they couldn't do much against the masked vampire's troops. Her forces were filled with incompetent soldiers Madhart had appointed. This was evidence enough

of the contempt the Republic held for her.

Rainsworth ordered his subcommander to retreat, then turned around. He couldn't fathom where Nelia had teleported to, but there was one way to find out.

Then he got a call. He poured mana into the Correspondence Crystal.

"Lord Rainsworth, there's something I want to talk about."

"Abercrombie. What's the matter?"

Not all eight units of the Gerra-Aruka Republic had stormed Faure at the same time. The Fifth Unit, led by Abercrombie, was supposed to leave the capital once Rainsworth and Nelia started their attack. Did some problem arise?

"Well...there's been a bit of an issue here in the capital."

"What is it?"

"The executive office blew up."



Lonne Cornelius, top brass of Inverse Moon, was taken aback.

She had been cooped up in the underground of the executive office of the president of the Gerra-Aruka Republic as of late, cultivating shiitake (and manufacturing illegal Divine Instruments). But just when she'd gone out for a bit to bet on horse racing, the entire office exploded, along with the timber for her shiitake (and the aforementioned illegal Divine Instruments).

"WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAT?!?!?!?"

The explosion had been deadly. The twelve-story building was nothing but a pile of rubble now, and even the ugly, artificial garden that had no sign of nature's beauty was now in ruins. Only the lower half of Madhart's bronze statue remained.

Eighth Unit troops, whose main job was to protect the capital, were running all around in a panic alongside the office guards. Some onlookers were there, too, curiously observing the disaster.

Who could have foreseen this?

Cornelius was in a bad mood already. She had been activating her Core Implosion excessively to make those Divine Instruments and had gone to the races to relax, but she'd lost her bet, and just that morning, Amatsu had scoffed at the novel she wrote, saying it was boring. Now the executive office was gone alongside her shiitake (and Divine Instruments).

"Why me...? I was just trying to make some snacks to go with my liquor..."

"What are you talking about?"

She turned to the voice. It was a man clad in kimono—Kakumei Amatsu. He was staring at her while nibbling on *taiyaki*.

"Amatsu! Look! The executive office is gone!"

"It is. Blown to bits."

"My shiitake's blown to bits, too!"

"Who cares. Want some *taiyaki*?"

"Yes."

He handed her a paper bag, and she took out a *taiyaki*. Custard cream came gushing out of the fish-shaped pastry as she took a bite. A disappointment, since she was hoping the filling would be red-bean paste.

"Spectacular, isn't it? To think the executive office has been reduced to rubble. What is this, a battlefield? Oh. Indeed, it is." Amatsu laughed.

"Amatsu...what is going on? Is this the work of an antiestablishment group?"

"Dissident terrorists here aren't capable of this. The office is protected by multiple layers of magical barriers. You'd need immense physical power to break through all that...or Core Implosion."

"Core Implosion... Oh. So it was Petrose Calamaria."

Inverse Moon had a database on all Core Implosion holders in the world. The only one capable of such a feat was the commander of the First Unit of the Mulnite Empire.

So the explosion was an attack on Mulnite's part.

"Is Madhart dead? Should we hold a funeral or something?"

“I’m sure he’s alive. I doubt the great hero who overthrew the monarchy would go down that easily.”

“I guess. He looks like a tough guy.”

“In any case, people don’t die from physical attacks. In this day and age, they’re protected by the Dark Core. The true deadly Effulgent Magic are words—the infinite power they hold.”

“True. I wanted to kill myself back then when you shit-talked my novel.”

“Letting your emotions be swayed by criticism is only human, but I would find it foolish to end your only life so easily.”

“Then don’t say that!”

“I only stated the truth. It was boring. Back on topic, Mulnite is serious now. They’ll try to destroy Gerra-Aruka not only through force, but words, too.”

Amatsu showed her a piece of paper. A flyer of some sort. The text was written in overly dramatic font.

Madhart’s oppression is overwhelming. He will send anyone who dares express a dissenting opinion to prison. The secret police patrols stalks the land every night. No one can sleep easy. Should we let him get away with it any longer? Must we stay quiet in the face of injustice? It is the time to stand up for our rights! Put an end to Madhart’s evil!

“I see this scattered everywhere. The people of Gerra-Aruka feel invigorated, reading these words they’ve been holding back in print. It’s doing a great job.”

Cornelius gazed at the people walking in the streets. The Warblades looked like they had found hope. The Gerra-Aruka Republic was the only one of the six nations in which the head of state was appointed through elections. Whoever won through the official channels gained authority, and Madhart had brandished it like a weapon, using the garrison and police to stomp out any who opposed him.

What did the oppressed people think?

Whatever they did, it was of no concern to her.



I was standing by a river the next moment.

The sound of the water flowing and the birds chirping was comforting. Everything around me was green. It was like a different world from that place of explosions and screams.

Then I realized. Nelia had used her magic to bring me here.

“Lady Komari, are you okay?”

I turned to the voice. The sicko maid was standing there on high alert. *So she got Vill, too.*

“I’m fine. What about you?”

“I’m well, thank you. What about that girl on the ground there?”

I followed Vill’s line of sight.

I couldn’t believe it. The kimono girl was lying there, her eyes swirling.

“K-Karlaaa?! You okay?!”

“Hush, Lady Komari. That’s one of the Five Imperial Sabers, the strongest person in the world, we’re talking about. No need to worry about her. That dizzying movement must be some sort of Heavenly Paradise ritual.”

“Doesn’t it seem like she’s about to faint?”

“This must be what they call ‘zazen’ in the East. I’ve heard they do this meditative practice cleanse their minds of worldly thoughts and use their mind’s eye to examine the truth of the universe.”

“Why do that now, though? Hey, isn’t that a lump on her head?”

“Perhaps her head was shaped like that from the beginning.”

“I don’t remember that...or wait, maybe you’re right...”

There was no point worrying about it either way. It didn’t look like her life was in danger. Besides, she did say herself that she was the strongest in the world. There’s no way she would have hit her head after the shock of teleportation and faint, right? I mean, not even I did that. So I decided to leave her be.

“Oh my, it seems we’ve got a couple intruders.”

I heard a girl's voice. Suddenly, a peach-color-haired girl teleported atop a boulder near the river. Nelia Cunningham. The Gerra-Aruka commander who'd taken us here to begin with.

Vill grabbed a kunai. I...clenched my fist and took a fighting stance. Hopefully the right way.

"N-Nelia! What do you want?! Where are we?!"

"Near the Daydream Paradise...is where I intended, but it appears that stupid Madhart destroyed the portal. I don't know where we are."

Nelia jumped down from the boulder. It was then that I noticed her smiling maid, Gertrude, was behind her.

"No need to be so tense. I don't want to fight."

"You lie."

"I'm telling the truth. Didn't you read my letter? I talked about my and Aruka's circumstances."

I looked at Vill. She shook her head.

I didn't get anything like that, did I? I just got that one that said, I will never forget this humiliation. Which made the Seventh Unit guys start planning "Operation Murder the Moonpeach Princess."

"...What? You really didn't get it?"

"I don't remember seeing anything like that..."

"That's weird. Maybe it got lost in the mail? Anyhow...I really don't want to fight. Please believe me."

"But you led your army against us back there."

"I had to, as a general. I really didn't want to do that."

"Didn't you want to make me your servant and take over the world?"

"Yes to the former. But taking over the world was a lie."

"You really want me as your servant?!"

"Having you as my subordinate would make for a very fun daily life...but let's

set that aside for now. I really don't want to take over the world. Madhart's the only one planning such lunacy. Well, perhaps I would be willing to do it, too, but only for the sake of peace."

Nelia dropped her twin blades on the ground. Vill's jaw dropped along with them. A Warblade's weapons were tantamount to their own life—there was no better proof that Nelia really wasn't there to fight us.

"Komari, I understood you were a pacifist from our tea party the other day. I can tell that you're not an idiot drunk on power, that you're not like Madhart."

"Sure, I'm a scholar, and as such, I'm aware of the appropriate time and place to use my power..."

"I know your true colors. I know that you don't want any needless war. You're really just like my mentor."

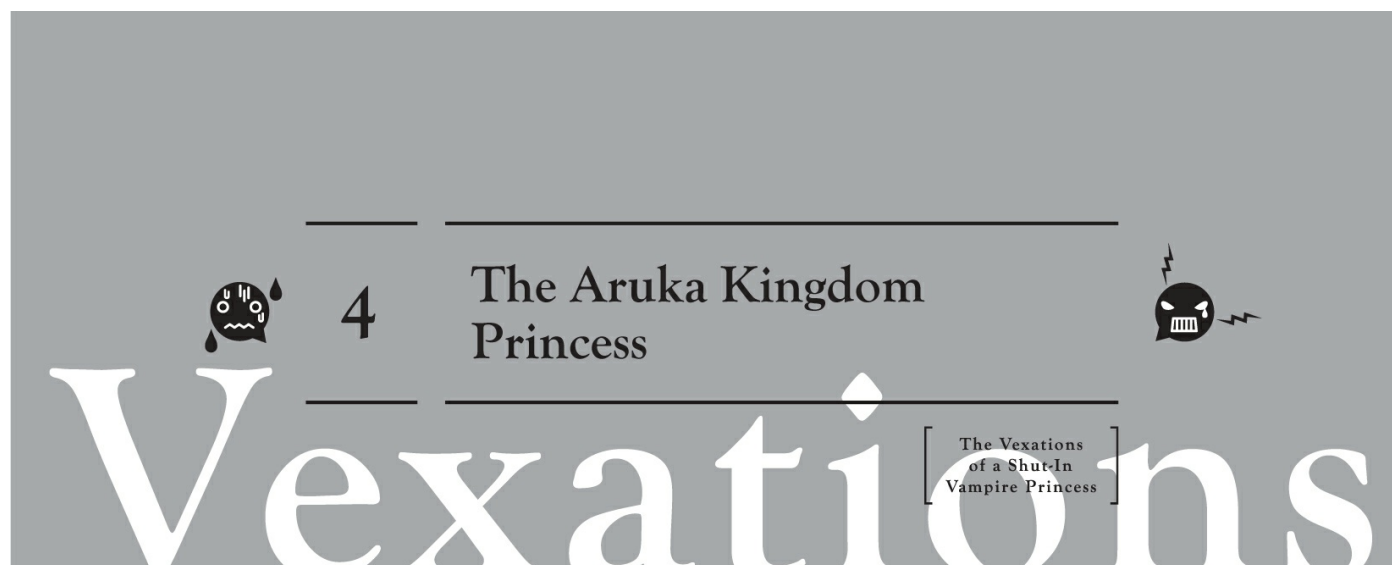
"Who's that?"

"Your mother." All sound disappeared; I felt as if her confident eyes stared straight through my soul. "How about we make a deal? You're angry about Madhart's extremist actions. I hate them, too. So let's face him together, and there'll be nothing to fear."

"B-but..."

"Don't be afraid. I know we can do anything together. We could change the world... I can feel it."

Her expression wasn't that of an idealistic girl. It was the face of a revolutionary who'd faced reality, analyzed it, and had strengthened her resolve to destroy it despite everything.



“Be kind. Kinder than anyone else.”

Her father’s creed was simple. It was because of that naivete, and his stubbornness in repeating it, that Nelia Cunningham always felt the need to rebel against him.

Nelia didn’t have brothers or sisters. The Moonpeach Princess had the crown secured, and everyone knew it, which was also why the king was strict in his teaching. She understood that, but still, she thought that his principles—“Peace is best”; “Never punch back”; “Don’t fight back”—were foolish.

What truly maddened Nelia was how he’d forbidden her from entering combat. She couldn’t wield her sword without her father’s permission, despite the fact that Warblades found meaning through fighting. Her father’s exceedingly pacifist philosophy repulsed her.

“I don’t want you to end up like your mother,” he said.

She understood those words now, kind of. Her mother had passed away shortly after giving birth to her, during one of her battles as an Illustrious General. The enemy commander had brought an illegal Divine Instrument to battle and gouged out her heart with it, killing her for good.

That was the start of her father’s hatred of combat. He cut the Eight Illustrious Generals down to two, allotted the military budget elsewhere, and dramatically decreased the number of sports-wars the nation participated in.

“Father, why won’t you fight?”

“Because there is no need to. You don’t need to fight, either.”

“...I want to be the strongest. Then nobody would be able to defy me. Aruka would become the greatest country in the world.”

“Were you visiting Madhart again?”

“Is it so wrong? He tells me all about how to control the world.”

Her father sighed.

Madhart had been influencing her with his extremist views as of late. He was one of the two Illustrious Generals and a heroic figure, considered the strongest Warblade. He was also an outspoken nationalist; he proudly made problematic statements such as, “All other races shall prostrate themselves before the Aruka Kingdom and the Warblades.”

“Warblades are the strongest species. We are superior to all others.”

“I am delighted to hear you understand. Warblades shall conquer the world.”

“Aruka would take back its glory if only Lady Nelia took the crown immediately!”

Everything Madhart said was the exact opposite of her father’s centrist pacifism—it stirred and excited young Nelia’s mind.

And so the king did it out of fear for his daughter’s well-being. It was six years ago, in the spring when she was nine years old, when Nelia first met *her*.

It was just slightly after noon when the king summoned Nelia. Annoyed, she put away the book she was reading and went to meet her father while grumbling in a low voice.

Nelia found a woman standing next to him when she arrived.

“She will be your mentor. I hope you learn a lot from her.”

“Mentor...?”

Nelia gazed at her with eyes wide open. The vampire had blond hair and a gentle look in her eyes.

“This is Commander Yulinne Gandesblood, one of the Seven Crimson Lords. Nelia, where are your manners?”

She couldn’t move. The golden vampire, Yulinne, smiled to greet her. *Her*

smile burns like the sun, she banally thought.

“Nice to meet you, Nelia.”

She reached out a graceful hand, but Nelia didn’t shake it. All other races were inferior to the Warblades—Madhart’s words had taught her to refuse to see the lady as an equal, much less a teacher.

Even during their first lesson, Nelia had been insolent.

“Altruism? The hell is that?”

“It means acting out of consideration for other people’s feelings. Let’s say we have a cup of pudding here, okay?”

“We don’t, though.”

“Pretend there is. Here’s the pudding. It’s only one cup. Now, next to you there’s a vampire child, who also wants to eat it. What would you do?”

“Kill the vampire and eat the pudding.”

Yulinne barely managed to keep her smile.

“Why did you think to do that?”

“The world is built atop conflict, and only the strong win. The Warblades are also superior to any other races. Killing a vampire would be as easy as snapping my fingers, so I only made the obvious decision.”

“I see. That sort of thinking is wrong. If you only make enemies, no one will be there to help you whenever you end up in real trouble.”

Nelia rolled her eyes. She couldn’t take any more of this vampire’s preaching.

“What do I do, then? Are you suggesting I give it to the kid?”

“Just divide it in two.”

Ridiculous. You can’t cleanly divide a pudding in two; it’d end get all mushed up.

Yet Nelia’s values were slowly changing. Yulinne was cleverly chipping away at the girl’s obstinacy.

Insubstantial stuff like etiquette and history weren’t the only things she

taught the girl—Yulinne always said the palace secretary would have sufficed if that was the case. She also taught her how to fight and how to strategize. This was what grabbed Nelia's interest. She could never forget the time Yulinne told her, *"I'll teach you how to kill your enemies, but don't tell your father."*

Nelia opened her heart soon enough. Her teacher beat her to a pulp in training. She reproached her for making discriminatory remarks. Still, Yulinne was kind. She would show Nelia the right way whenever she erred and would praise her whenever she succeeded.

Would my mother have been like this, were she alive?

Nelia saw her tutor as a motherly figure.

So whenever Yulinne talked about her own daughter, Nelia sulked.

"I have four children, and the most mischievous is the third. She's truly impish... I mean, she's a good kid, but she only makes trouble for her big brother and sister, not to mention she sometimes carelessly kills others. She's a real problem child."

"Sounds like I'm more responsible, huh?"

"That you are. But...I think she will lead Mulnite one day. No, not only Mulnite—I believe she'll make the entire world a more exciting place."

Nelia was green with envy. She didn't like it when her beloved mentor praised someone else. The golden vampire noticed and apologized with a smile.

"You're amazing, too. I'm sure you'll lead Aruka one day."

"But Madhart said that Aruka is rotten to the core."

"Well, I like it here. It's a peaceful country." She beamed.

Thinking back, perhaps the Aruka Kingdom really was rotten to the core...for a certain group of people.

Back then, there had been frequent protests at the palace. Warblades were supposed to be murder machines. The people of Aruka didn't agree with the king's excessive pacifism—and as young as she was, even Nelia could understand her father was wrong.

The people loudly criticized the government. They said they wanted war, that they shouldn't be scaling down the military, that the kingdom was turning into an international embarrassment; they asked why her father opposed conflict when the Dark Core was there to minimize its risks.

Nelia thought they were right, but she'd started doubting Madhart's extremist views. Yulinne had told her that combat without respect for the opponent was pointless, and what Madhart wanted was very obviously that kind of depraved war.

The further Nelia was attuned to Yulinne's morals, the more she looked at Madhart with disappointment.

"Altruism and harmony are stupid."

"Warblades shall reign supreme. Don't you understand, Lady Nelia?"

Madhart had intended to raise her into a strong monarch, but his plans failed. After she got a vampire teacher, his beliefs—turning all other races into slaves so that only Warblades ruled the world—felt lacking in realism. Delirious.

What sealed the deal was something that happened at a party between the people of Aruka and Mulnite. Nelia's father took her to the Mulnite Empire's palace. It was her first trip outside the kingdom, and she was anxious about it, but more than that, she felt happy about getting to see her mentor's homeland.

Lots of people were gathered in the hall. Vampires from the Mulnite Empire as well as Warblades from the Aruka Kingdom. Nelia looked around, bored. She wanted to go see Yulinne, but her mentor was surrounded by many others, and she didn't have the courage to intrude.

"Lady Nelia, watch those enemy commanders closely," said her guard, Illustrious General Madhart, with a scowl. "We will eventually subjugate them; this is our chance to get the intel we need. Inferior as they may be, we can never let our guard down."

"Yeah..."

Was Madhart right? Sure enough, the people wanted war, but everything that came out of this man's mouth felt dangerous, like an unsheathed blade.

He didn't seem like he just wanted war. She could tell as much just by the gaze of contempt he directed at other races.

Nelia felt uncomfortable and left for the table where all the food was. She hadn't had lunch yet, so this was a good time to get some grub.

There was one only pudding atop a plate.

That looks tasty..., she thought as she reached for it, when her hand bumped into someone else's. She looked to her side in surprise.

"Huh...?"

She was flabbergasted. The girl...looked like her mentor, but she wasn't. She seemed about Nelia's age. Her hair was golden and her eyes, crimson—beautiful. The prettiest girl she had ever seen.

The girl also opened her eyes wide in surprise, but then she smiled right away.

"Sorry. You can have it."

"But you reached for it first."

"Let's go halvesies, then," she said as she dug the spoon into the pudding.

She couldn't cleanly split it in two. "Huh? Gimme a sec." She scooped more and more until it became a sloppy mess. Then the messy blob slipped off the plate and onto the floor.

"Aaaah!" she screamed.

Nelia sighed, but then she smiled. She hadn't known who that girl was then, but she had an inkling. She smelled just like her mentor.

"Hey, Nelia! Good to have you here," her clear voice echoed.

Her mentor, Yulinne Gandesblood, was approaching her, followed by a crowd. The other girl turned around right away.

"Mommy! I ruined the pudding..."

"Hmm? Oh my. Grab a napkin from there."

"Oh yeah." She did as told and picked up the pudding's remains.

Mrs. Gandesblood then wiped the smudge off the floor with magic.

“Mommy.” It really was her daughter. When they stood next to each other, Nelia saw how they looked practically identical.

Yulinne smiled gracefully at Nelia.

“Welcome to Mulnite. We won’t have a lesson today. Have fun!”



“Oh! Is this the next monarch of Aruka?!” A blond girl appeared from behind Mrs. Gandesblood.

Nelia took half a step back in surprise. The girl (no, was she an adult woman? She wasn't sure) had an imposing presence, like a flash of lightning. She surveyed Nelia from her head to her toes.

“Wow! She'll make a great queen! Pleased to meet you, I am Commander Karen Helvetius, of the Third Unit of the Mulnite Imperial Army. It is an honor.”

“O-okay.”

“I met your mother in the battlefield plenty of times, and you sure look just like her, especially that pretty peach-colored hair. You'll grow up to be such a beauty. Can't wait to see that.”

That was creepy. Way too energetic.

Her mentor then stood before her, as if to protect her from Commander Karen.

“Ren...you're scaring her.”

“Please, how can I not be interested in your protégée?”

“Forget about that and go get more pudding.”

“Hmn? You're right, the pudding's all gone! Petrose! You ate it all, didn't you?!”

“What? I didn't eat any...”

“There's caramel sauce all over your mouth! You gotta let the kids have some! You're ruining the party! Odilon, go get more. Now.”

“What authority do you have to order me?! Agh! Don't kick me!”

The scary-looking old guy went to the kitchen after getting his butt kicked by Commander Karen.

Mulnite sure is full of funny people... Nelia sighed. Mrs. Gandesblood did so as well.

“Sorry our guys are all so noisy. You must feel annoyed.”

“No. But Mulnite really is an odd country.”

“You might be right. Now, I have a meeting with your dad. Play with Komari for a bit, will you?”

She still didn't know what that meeting entailed, but by then, the world already thought of Yulinne Gandesblood as the next Mulnite Empress. Maybe they were going to talk about the future of both nations.

Nelia turned to look at the other girl, Komari.

She was really pretty. Like, a once-in-a-billion-years knockout beauty.

“Let's chat, then, Komari.”

Komari nodded. She looked shy.

Nelia soon realized she was wrong about that. Once the adults left, they sat at a table in the corner to eat pasta. Terakomari Gandesblood was a peculiar girl. Nelia still held some racist views Madhart had instilled in her; she thought Mrs. Gandesblood was an exception and that vampires as a whole were inferior still. But once she got to talking with Komari, all that went away.

Perhaps it was because the vampire princess had the kindest, most generous heart.

“Your mom is amazing, Komari. Everyone in the six nations knows of the great commander.”

“You think? I don't get it. She's never really home.”

“She is! You will become a commander just like her, right?”

“No... I don't like fighting.”

Nelia was shocked. She'd thought for sure she would follow in the steps of her mother.

She considered testing her further. She imitated Madhart and said: “But you can't take over the world if you don't fight.”

“Take over the world?” Komari was baffled. “No... I think you can, without fighting.”

“How?”

“You can become friends with everyone in the world. Then there’ll be peace. That’s basically taking over the world, right?”

“...”

“So I want to be your friend, too.”

“R-really?”

“You...don’t like me?”

Nelia was startled. She couldn’t deny the contempt for other races she held inside her heart.

“No... I do. I like you.”

“Good to know.” The blond girl went back to eating pasta.

Nelia stared at her. Her way of thinking was the polar opposite of Madhart’s. She seriously seemed to think it was possible to take over the world through friendship. This could never work—as soon as even one person didn’t join her, someone like Madhart, everything would go up in smoke. She probably didn’t understand the real world yet.

Still, that mindset moved Nelia.

She then felt it was stupid to look down on people for not being Warblades. She’d tried to share that pudding with her; she was a good vampire. What use was pursuing gains for her country by harming girls like her? She started feeling like Madhart’s discriminatory views were wrong.

Nelia wanted to know more about this girl.

“Hey, Komari, Vampires suck blood, right? Wanna drink mine?”

“Huh...?”

“Mrs. Gandesblood told me that vampires build mutual trust by drinking each other’s blood. I think we could be friends. So how about you drink mine, as a symbol of our friendship?”

Nelia rolled up her sleeve and held out her arm.

Komari hesitated. Maybe Warblade blood tasted bad?

Then Nelia felt someone standing behind them.

“Lady Nelia, you shouldn’t get so close to vampires.”

It was Madhart. He grabbed Nelia’s arm and lifted her from the chair.

“Ow! Stop that!”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t let a vampire drink of you. Yours is royal blood—you can’t give it to a foreign power willy-nilly.”

“What? I only want to be friends with Komari.”

“I just told you that you shouldn’t get so close to vampires.”

“Isn’t that the point of this party, though?” Nelia said, then turned around, astounded; Komari was staring straight at Madhart. “Shouldn’t we be getting close?”

“I’m saying that there are limits, and you need to be more prudent. There’s always been walls separating Warblades and vampires.”

“You’re the one making those walls!”

Madhart blinked. Nelia almost laughed in his face. It was hard to believe she was able to talk back to the strongest Illustrious General. It took courage enabled by ignorance.

“You were just staring at everyone back there, weren’t you? Were you bored?” Nelia continued.

“Not at all. I couldn’t be happier to have been invited to this luxurious party. Perhaps too luxurious for the vampires.”

Komari glared at Madhart and said, “Mommy said being selfish isn’t good.”

“...Hah?”

“You want this palace, don’t you, mister? But it’s not yours; it’s everyone’s.”

“...”

“Let’s get along. If you’re not having fun, then you can have my pudding.”

Madhart’s eyes were bloodshot. Nelia chuckled. This girl was seriously worried about the man being left out.

“You cheeky little...”

Just then, a vampire in religious vestments noticed the threat and arrived and interrupted Madhart.

“Good day, Lord Madhart! Please come with me to chat about God!” he yelled as he took away the mad commander.

Nelia finally laughed out loud. Watching the man get owned by a little girl was the most hilarious thing she’d ever seen. Komari, on the other hand, was confused about what just happened.

Oh, she’ll be a big shot for sure, Nelia thought.

“You’re really funny. You’re definitely her child. So want to drink my blood?”

“No, thank you.”

She refused. Nelia felt like crying.

That was how she learned how to treat all peoples equally. In a sense, it was also the meeting that brought about her misfortune.



The events that followed came dizzyingly quick, one after the other.

Madhart determined Nelia would never change her mind again and launched a coup d’état. He dispatched troops he had been rallying in secret to surround the palace. Soon the king fell from his throne in fear, and Madhart watched him with contempt as he said: “I can understand why you don’t enjoy conflict, but avoiding it so much that you would sell national territory to foreign nations? Why do you yield to the Haku-Goku Commonwealth’s threats? Keep doing that, and the Aruka Kingdom will be gone in no time!”

The king had supposedly given them control over one part of their Dark Core Zone territory to avoid war. This was apparently the trigger for Madhart’s coup.

The king’s reputation went downhill soon after that information went public. Royalty and corrupt nobility were sent to prison for crimes against the state, and so the monarchy fell. The republic was then established, with Madhart as its first president.

Nelia could do nothing but watch everything unfold in silence. Her mentor

had disappeared from the battlefield a few days before the coup. Nelia wrote to her but received no response. Later she heard that Yulinne Gandesblood had been killed.

Madhart stood before Nelia and said:

“Lady Nelia... No. Nelia Cunningham. You are young and powerless. I will spare you from being sent to prison like your father, but you are hereby stripped of all authority as royalty. You will live as a commoner. Be a good Warblade.”

The despair nearly made her lose her mind. She had no one to turn to. Gertrude, a maid from the palace, was her only ally—everyone else became enemies. Nobody liked the daughter of a traitor.

So began the Gerra-Aruka Republic, with Madhart at the helm.

At first, the people welcomed him with open arms. But the new president was a monster in many ways. No matter what direction he aimed for, the people couldn't keep up with him.

He was also ruthless to anyone who opposed him. Not only did he crack down on organized rebels with his secret police, but he also sent to prison anyone who showed sign of disagreement. “Prison.” It was actually a concentration camp—hell on this world. Madhart called it the Daydream Paradise. Though he'd started building a resort on top of it recently, its true form lay underground.

Nelia's father, too, toiled beneath the Daydream Paradise. She had to rescue him.

That prick who thought of everyone else as trash shouldn't be president.

Nelia worked hard. She rose through the ranks and became an Illustrious General. She was close to achieving her goal. Madhart keeping the republic system was to her advantage. Once she exposed his deeds and the secret of the Daydream Paradise to the rest of the world, it would be over for him.

Then Nelia would be the next president and she would reform the Aruka Republic.

For that, she needed help—help from her mentor’s daughter. Komari.



“That’s how it is. Won’t you help me defeat Madhart?”

“...Huh? We knew each other?”

“I told you that at the beach. I was shocked you didn’t remember, really.”

“Sorry.”

Setting aside whether or not I really met her before, if what she’s saying is true, then yeah, President Madhart is a monstrous tyrant. And Nelia’s saying she can’t take him on by herself...so she asked for my help.

Meaning that world-domination talk was just a test of character. Tiringly roundabout, but okay. I would’ve just asked, “Hey, so are you a murderer or what?”

In any case, I understood the situation, but there was one big problem. I couldn’t exactly help Nelia if I had no power that would live up to her expectations. She thought I really was the strongest vampire out there. I mean, I’d never lost a war and even won the Crimson Match, so sure, looking at my achievements, that was no exaggeration...but yeah. I couldn’t say anything in reply. Then she chuckled.

“No need to think so hard about it. We Warblades and vampires should join hands, right?”

“...You said you knew my mom, right?”

“Yes. I owe her a lot.”

Nelia took a pendant out of her pocket. There was a photo inside it: her younger self...and my mother standing right next to her. I could feel my eyes welling up.

“She even gave me these twin blades. They were a present after our last lesson. So? Do you trust me a bit more now?”

“...”

I stared straight into her eyes. She had to be a good girl if she was my mom’s

protégée. I couldn't feel the characteristic evil aura that bad people had in her... at least on the surface.

"Don't let yourself be fooled, Lady Komari," Vill said, glaring at Nelia. "You can't believe what the Moonpeach Princess says. It's obvious she will try to stab you the moment you let your guard down."

"My, I don't have it easy, do I? Believe me, I wouldn't stab you. I would rather force you into being my servant."

"Did you hear that, Lady Komari? She only thinks of vampires as slaves."

"Hold on! You're also a maid, so you shouldn't be so prejudiced!" Gertrude yelled, her face as expressive as always. "Sure, Madhart and Rainsworth are racist jerks! But Lady Nelia is not like that! She has a wonderfully benevolent heart! Her mindset is nothing like you stupid lowly vampires!"

"You think a truly kindhearted person would say 'I would rather force you into being my servant?' I don't find that to be a very caring mindset, Ms. Gertrude."

"Getting to be Lady Nelia's servant is a blessing! That much I can guarantee myself! She always holds birthday parties for me! I turned fifteen last June, and she gifted me perfume from the Enchanted Lands! It smells really good!"

"Perfume? What a simple maid. Being Lady Komari's servant is much better. You get to dive into her bed every night and hold her tight and savor her sweet fragrance with your whole body."

"Wuh..." Gertrude was speechless.

"Stop lying! You're grossing her out!" I said.

"I am very much not lying."

"You're not?!"

"Ah-ha-ha-ha! You're a funny duo." Nelia laughed.

How embarrassing. I couldn't have people knowing my subordinate was a sicko, or they would think I was one, too.

"Anyway...will you help me, Komari?"

"She will not. Warblades think us as inferior; why should we?"

“Vill, that is prejudiced. Setting aside the servant thing,” I said; I had to. “Sure, maybe the top brass of the Gerra-Aruka Republic are full of jerks. You heard how that Rainsworth talked back there. But that doesn’t mean Nelia has to be one, too. She said so herself; she wants to change her country. Besides...my mom taught her. I think we can trust her, even if only a little bit.”

Mommy had been a good judge of character. I think.

Nelia also seemed to be fond of my mom. I couldn’t just give her the cold shoulder. I had no idea what I could actually do for her, but I wanted to help her out.

“Vill...won’t you follow my judgment, at least this once?”

“I understand. I will do as you say.”

“Good. Okay then, Nelia, hope I can—”

“Thank you!”

Then I felt something soft against my body.

Her pink hair tickled my cheeks. She was hugging me. It happened so fast, I froze. *Huh? What? Why’s she hugging me out of nowhere? Is this some cultural thing?* Then something even more shocking happened.

She brought her lips to my cheeks.

...??

“WHAT?! L-LADY NELIA?!”

“?!?!?! Lady Komari, stand back, you’re in danger!”

“Bwuh? Wuh??”

Vill grabbed my arm at an incredible speed and pulled me over. I couldn’t understand what was going on, but I could feel my cheeks growing hotter. What??

Nelia looked at me with a bewitching smile.

“Hee-hee, why are you blushing? This is just a greeting, Aruka style.”

“O-oh...so it really was a different custom. Yeah, we don’t really do that in

Mulnite...”

“Lady Nelia! We don’t greet people liked that in Aruka!” Gertrude exclaimed.

“Lady Cunningham, please do not touch Lady Komari so casually. You will infect her with your rust.”

“Don’t hug me so tight! You’re gonna break my ribs!” I yelled.

“I’m sorry. By the way, would you let me greet you Aruka-style?” Vill asked.

“NO!!”

“Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha! You’re so funny. Well then, Komari. Our alliance is formed. The Aruka-Mulnite Alliance to destroy Gerra-Aruka! How about you all become my servants in celebration of the occasion?” Nelia said.

“Not in a million years!”

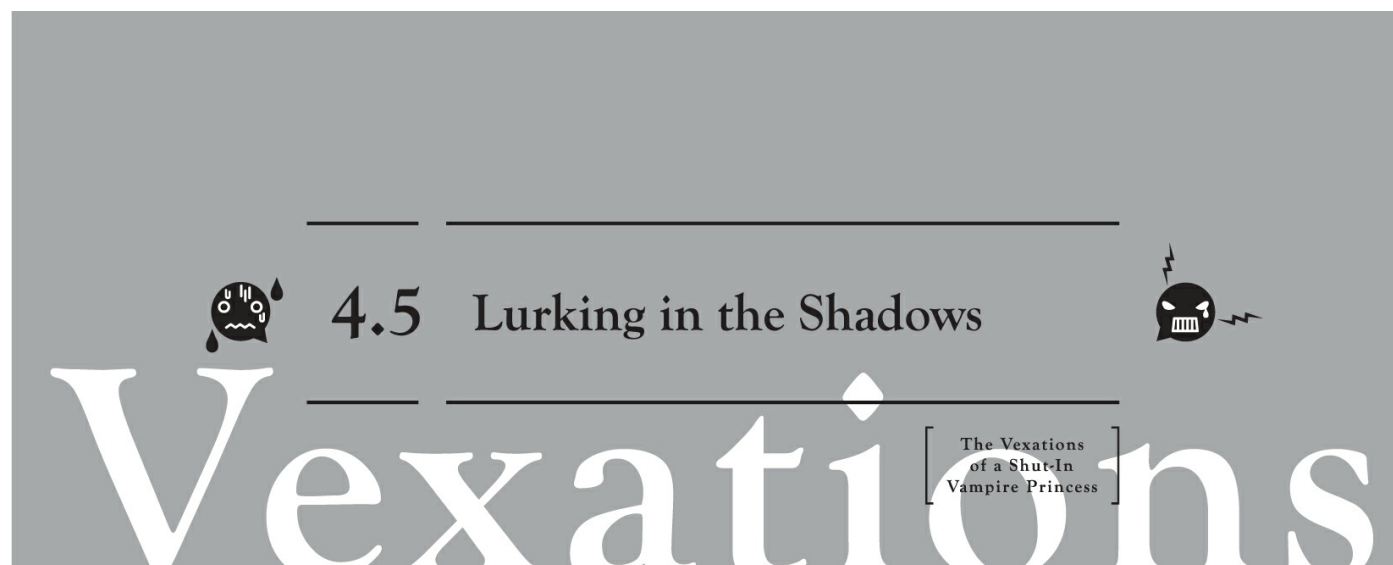
So a new alliance was formed.

I struggled to get out of my maid’s grasp. No fooling around anymore. Our opponent was a true savage who yearned for genuine war—we had nothing but hardship in our near future. When all I wanted was to stay home and read... Why did I always get dragged to the most violent places?

“...Huh? Where am I? What was I doing? I can’t remember anything...”

The remaining girl finally came back to her senses.

Thus began our hellish journey to Daydream Paradise.



The sun was beginning to set.

The attacks on the fortress city were starting to simmer down, but the battle was far from over. The enemy forces were simply retreating. And considering how unlikely it was that they would give up just like that, they'd probably be back the next day.

It was dusk, and the Great Crimson Lord, aka the Black Flash, Flöte Mascarail, surveyed the area from atop the castle walls as the enemy troops teleported away.

The inside of the citadel was in a terrible state. Corpses of various nationalities lay everywhere, the floors tainted by blood and the buildings turned into rubble. Sports-wars didn't take place inside cities—the disastrous sight astonished Flöte.

“Sup, Flöte. Good work back there.”

“Lady Karen!”

Flöte turned around, elated. There stood Her Majesty the Empress, the person she respected the most, clad in the same dress as always despite being on the battlefield. Her poise was stunningly sublime. As gorgeous as ever... Then the Empress held a glass out to her.

“You must be tired. Take a rest.”

“Th-thank you so much...but I am in the middle of a mission.”

“Lady Mascarail, this is plain apple juice! There is nothing to worry about,” the crazy priest said.

Helldeus Heaven was standing next to the Empress. His vestments were dyed in blood, but he didn't appear to be wounded. He hadn't lasted all this time as a Crimson Lord for nothing.

Flöte accepted the juice and let its sweetness wash her fatigue away.

"Lord Madhart sure pulled a fast one on us. Never heard of someone wishing to invade other nations, let alone actually try it. Shall I go to their capital and give him a harsh sermon?"

"Don't bother. I doubt he sees religion as anything but another tool for war."

The Empress leaned on the wall and crossed her arms. Her profile, lit by the twilight sun, was awe-inspiring. Ever so breathtaking.

"I see, I see. Though, I must praise his strategy. Faure is a key territory of the Mulnite Empire. It would take a long time to rebuild this place were he to destroy it."

"We just gotta make Gerra-Aruka rebuild it for us. We will win this war."

"Um... Lady Karen, what makes you so sure of it?"

"Simple. Because the Mulnite Empire is the strongest."

That doesn't answer anything. Yet when it comes from her mouth, it sounds like unquestionable truth. How curious.

"They're not doing much, actually. I believe Madhart planned to send all Eight Illustrious Generals against us, but only four units came. Which means our play was successful."

"Our play?"

"Blowing up the president's executive office."

Flöte nearly dropped her cup. She couldn't believe her ears.

"It was Petrose's doing. The Gerra-Aruka capital must be in chaos right now. Our scouts say some of the generals were called back there. I don't think the president thought we'd attack his own base. We could even destroy Aruka in its entirety right now."

"I—I don't think that would be the best course of action."

“I know. But I think Aruka needs some change after what just happened. Well, our key is already on her way to Daydream Paradise.”

“Key...? Oh.” Flöte begrudgingly realized what she meant. The Empress thought way too highly of Terakomari Gandesblood.

The so-called offense group had been split up after Nelia Cunningham teleported away both Terakomari Gandesblood and Karla Amatsu. Delphyne and Sakuna Memoir were currently searching for them.

That klutzy failure of a vampire had nothing going for her besides her bloodline. How was *she* supposed to be the key to changing Aruka? Then the Empress smirked, as if taking notice of Flöte’s thoughts.

“Yes, I also mean Komari, but I’m mainly talking about Nelia.”

“Nelia...?”

“That Warblade isn’t like that foolish Madhart. She’ll be the cornerstone to shattering Aruka from within. She must already be colluding with Komari on their way to her country right now.”

“Your Majesty, that key doesn’t have troops with her. They wouldn’t be able to stand against the Republic’s forces. Let me send part of my unit to look for them.”

“No. Sakuna and Delphyne are already doing that, plus we’ve got other tricks under our sleeve.”

“Tricks? You mean Lady Calamaria? It might be dangerous leaving it up to her.”

“She’s gone to sleep; said she was tired. But we have one other unit in Mulnite—one without a commander.”

The Fifth Unit? What is she trying to say?

The Empress tapped Flöte’s shoulder and smiled.

“You should go to bed, too. Sapphires, beast-folk, and Immortals will be coming in great numbers tomorrow. We need you two to stay in peak condition, or both Mulnite and the Heavenly Paradise will be taken over.”



The battlefield was in an uproar after Terakomari Gandesblood disappeared.

First, the Seventh Unit lost their minds. Nelia Cunningham had taken away their precious and strong Commander Komari. The soldiers directed their rage toward the unit Cunningham left behind, slicing the rusted to pieces and blowing them away. Yet that didn't satisfy them. They started debating among themselves over who was responsible for the commander's kidnapping, and it soon turned into a brawl, which then became a bloodbath. Now only a hundred of Komari's men remained.

Delphyne sighed at the sight.

They said the Seventh Unit was the worst place to be demoted to, but who knew it was this bad? Thank goodness the Fourth Unit was a decent group.

Anyway.

"Her Majesty's orders are to search for Terakomari as we move toward the Daydream Paradise."

"Y-yes. Let's do our best." Sakuna Memoir startled at Delphyne's address; she'd been looking up at the sky, lost in thought. She shivered while clenching her fists. Scary.

"You know what she's like. Don't worry about her."

"I can't help worrying about her. I've heard of how terrible the people of Gerra-Aruka are."

"Then let's go find her soon."

"Yes. We will. And then...we'll defeat Aruka."

Delphyne was surprised. The Sixth Unit commander had a reputation for being timid. Considering her usual weak-willed personality, Delphyne thought Sakuna wouldn't care much for her mission as commander, but it seemed that was wrong. Perhaps this silver-haired girl was earnest deep down, a decent person despite her history as a member of Inverse Moon. Possibly the only upstanding member of the Crimson Lords, considering how loony the rest were.

"Let's go find Ms. Komari."

"You sure like her a lot."

“Yes...that’s why I’m worried. Everyone says she is the strongest Crimson Lord, but you wouldn’t believe how unreliable she really is. I have to be there for her...”

“I see.”

“I was supposed to be her younger sister, but lately it seems like our places have switched. I have to protect her. Back then when the Haku-Goku Commonwealth attacked, if it wasn’t for me, something terrible could’ve happened to her.”

“I—I see.”

“I can’t leave everything to Ms. Villhaze. She holds impure desires toward Ms. Komari, so I must be by her side at all times, even while sleeping, but I think she wouldn’t like that. Though I’ve been thinking about inviting her over for a sleepover lately.”

“...”

Was Sakuna *really* a decent person?

“Sure. Anyway, we have to go. Can you use seeking magic?”

“No, but I do have a locator planted on her.”

The silver vampire took out a hand-size magical instrument. Though it was technically illegal, the device allowed you to track where someone went.

“You’re well prepared. As if you knew she would be kidnapped from the very beginning.”

“Hee-hee. I just have it on her at all times.”

“...”

Yeah...she’s just another weirdo.



Madhart was alive.

The sudden explosion had blown the executive office to bits in an attack that would kill any normal person—but Madhart was a former Illustrious General. One of the only two back then. A detonation wasn’t enough to kill him.

Still, the explosion had the effect of changing people's mentalities, as did those flyers, which were most likely from the Mulnite Empire. Because of it all, the people started being more open about voicing their disapproval of his government. Madhart had tried controlling the riots with his garrison, but it only triggered rebel organizations to come out from the shadows like cockroaches, demanding he be taken down. It was only a matter of time before protests would start breaking out across the nation.

"Now they've done it," Madhart whispered, then took out his Correspondence Crystal.

If that's how they want to play, then very well. All nations will become slaves to Gerra-Aruka. All races will kneel to the Warblades.

"Mr. President, are you okay?!" Pascal Rainsworth asked from the other side of the line.

"I'm fine. I have a mission for you."

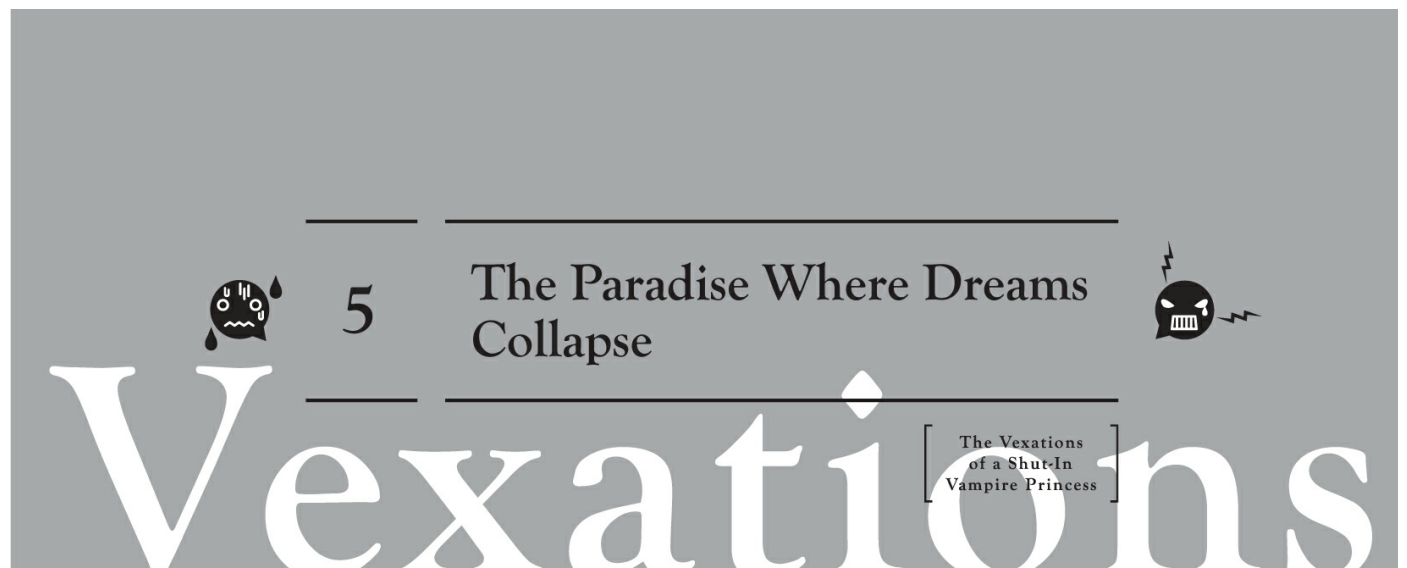
"As you say, but..."

"I heard about the situation. Continue following after Nelia Cunningham and Terakomari Gandesblood...but there's one other thing I want you to do as well."

"Yes?"

Madhart could picture Rainsworth's eyes looking up to him like a loyal dog. He curled his lips up as he spoke.

"I will dispatch the Daydream Unit. You will take command after you put Cunningham and Gandesblood in the Daydream Paradise. Get ready."



Nelia teleported us east of the Dark Core Zone.

We paid a passing wagon to let us on. Apparently, we could reach the Daydream Paradise after just a day of travel, but we couldn't do so overnight. We decided to stay the night at a town we found halfway there. The sign on the gate to the city read CARNALT. I was pooped after sitting in the wagon all day. My butt hurt. I wanted to sleep. On a bed.

However, Nelia stopped us before we entered the citadel and said:

“Wait. I just asked some guys leaving town, and apparently this has been making the rounds.”

She showed us a piece of paper that, for whatever reason, had Karla's and my picture on it. Below was text that looked finger-written in blood.

WANTED

The Evil Supreme Commanders Karla Amatsu and Terakomari Gandesblood.

Notify the garrison if you see these faces!

““What in the world?”” Karla and I shouted in unison.

Gertrude smirked as she explained, “Carnalt is under direct control of the Gerra-Aruka Republic. It seems they figured out you’re heading for the Daydream Paradise and put you on the wanted list!”

““WHY MEEEEEE?!”” Our voices coincided once again.

For a moment there, I felt kinship with the kimono girl. Well, I was already sure we were similar on some level considering we were both pacifists...but that wasn’t the matter at hand!

“So we’re in enemy territory?! We can’t stay the night, then!”

“We can’t relax here! I’m going home! Koharuuu! Where are you, Koharuuu? I’ll make you some tasty *anmitsu*, so please come out!”

“Don’t worry. Gertrude, get them *that*.”

The Warblade maid smiled as she walked up to me.

She gave me a pile of clothes.

I unfolded it.

It was a maid uniform, just like hers.

...Hah?

“Looks like you don’t get it, hmm? Just put that on, and there’ll be no problem. No one would ever think a supreme commander would be walking out in the open wearing a maid outfit, right?”

“I—I...I mean, sure, but...”

“Western clothing doesn’t befit me. I will use my own disguise,” Karla said as she produced a pair of colorful sunglasses from her pocket. Now her Eastern outfit had a funky edge. “Perfect, am I right?”

“Vill! Get me some sunglasses!”

“Please look closely, Lady Komari. That’s a stupid disguise.”

How? She looks so cool! I don’t wanna be a maid; I wanna be a funky-sunglasses vampire! Nelia wasn’t having it, though. She merrily grabbed my hand.

“Listen. You’ll act as my maid in this town. Okay? You need to call me Mistress or Lady Nelia. If you don’t, they’ll find out your identity, and who knows what they might do to you.”

“Ugh...don’t I get any choice other than being a maid?”

“You don’t! Now kneel before your mistress!”

“Wait a second, Lady Komari. Idiotic as just putting on sunglasses might be, her proposition is even more moronic.” Vill snatched the outfit from my hands and yelled, “Lady Komari will rule the world! I will not allow her to kneel before a foreign commander, even if it’s just as a disguise. So be my maid instead, yes?”

“I’m not becoming YOUR maid! Vill, c’mon, you’ve gotta have some other clothes for me.”

“Are you telling me to strip right here?”

“I’m not talking about *your* clothes!”

“I jest. I do have a backup set of your uniform, plus a swimsuit. Which one would you like?”

“.....Fine, I’ll dress as a maid.”

“Thank you! Now Komari’s my servant!”

“I AM NOT!”

In the end, I became Nelia’s maid (temporarily!).

I was forced to change outside, but better that than getting killed, I guess. I checked to make sure my sicko maid wasn’t following me from behind the trees, then changed into the outfit. It was a tad big for me, but oh well. At least I wouldn’t be recogni...

Hold on. Forget about that wanted poster, isn't my face known throughout the world thanks to Six Nations News?

I felt I needed some further change. Maybe trying a different hairstyle would work...so I tied my hair up in a ponytail. *That should be enough. Wish I had some sunglasses, too.*

I checked myself out with a hand mirror.

Man...this is so embarrassing.

"Komari, are you done?"

"EEK!"

I almost fell down out of surprise.

Nelia was staring intently at me.

"My, how cute! You really are a once-in-a-lifetime knockout beauty, huh?"

"Of course I am! B-but stop looking at me. This is so embarrassing..."

"You won't be able to enter the town without that outfit. Don't you want to relax at an inn?"

"Ugh... I—I do."

"Then call me Mistress."

"I'm not doing that! I'm just pretending to be your maid!"

"You never know who could be listening in. If someone finds out you are Terakomari Gandesblood and reports you to the police, and you get killed, then don't come crying to me. Say it. As practice."

Why do I have to do something so stupid? You have your own maid! Gertrude's right there! Though, if it's between a moment's embarrassment and my life, then there's no choice... Damn it all!

I stood before her, strengthening my will, and whispered:

"M-Mistress..."

"Ungh! Y-y'know, I'm a bit tired. How about you rub my shoulders?"

"WHAT?! Do it yourself!"

“I—I want *you* to do it! It’s just practice, c’mon. Or do you want to get reported to the police?”

I want to report YOU to the police!

Nelia materialized a wooden chair with Void Magic or something, then elegantly sat down and crossed her legs. I gave in, stood behind her, and started rubbing her slender shoulders.

“...H-how’s it? Good?”

“Terrible. You need to speak more deferentially.”

“H-how are you liking the massage, Mistress?”

“...Oh, I definitely need you as my servant for real.”

“NO WAY IN... No, thank you, Mistress!”

“I wouldn’t put you to work like Gertrude. I’d just like you to do what you’re good at. I don’t think it would be a bad deal.”

“What I’m good at?”

“What are you good at, by the way? Killing?”

“Um, well, I bake...”

“Then I’ll have you bake for me. You don’t have to do anything else, and you can take a break whenever you like.”

“Huh?”

“You can read all the books you want, play around any time you like, and even go out to the battlefield to kill whenever you feel like it. And if you ever want something you don’t have, just say the word, and I’ll buy it for you.”

“So I don’t have to work? I can stay cooped up inside all day?”

“C-cooped up? ...Yeah, sure. I’ll just call you whenever I want you to bake for me.”

“...”

“Call me Mistress once again, won’t you?”

“.....Mistress.”

“UNNNGH! Y-yes, good girl! From today on, you’re my maid, Komari!”

She patted my head. I cursed myself for saying that word.

But, um, isn’t this like the perfect “job”? I don’t have to kill anyone! Or get killed! I don’t have to live in fear of mutiny! Maybe I should just become her servant...

“Lady Komari, don’t fall for it! I’ll kill her right now!”

“Stop right there, vampire maid! I won’t let you lay a finger on Lady Nelia!”

The maids started fighting to death a bit away from us. Vill and Gertrude eyes were bloodshot as they slashed at each other with their weapons. *Waiiit! We’re on the same side!*

“Mis... No. Nelia! We’ve gotta stop them!”

“Not Nelia! I’m your mistress! Gosh! But you’re right. We have to go soon, or they’ll close the city gates. Gertrude! Playtime is over!”

Nelia put away her chair with magic, pulled me by the arm, and walked over to them.

I wished I also had the power to stop my sicko maid. *Maybe I should start doing push-ups. No, I always start hurting after two. That idea goes into the trash.*

The city guard didn’t realize who Nelia was. She also used THE ingenious method of disguise: sunglasses. Why? Because the Gerra-Aruka government was also looking for her. Rainsworth had told Madhart she was heading for the Daydream Paradise with us, so she’d ended up on the wanted list alongside Karla and me.

The guard looked at Nelia, then Karla, then stared intently at Gertrude and Vill, and finally observed me very closely. His eyebrows went up.

“Hmm? Do I know you, little lady?”

I hid behind Vill. *It’s over! I should’ve tied up my hair in pigtails, not a ponytail!* As I cursed my carelessness, Nelia took out a gold nugget from her pocket and, with a loud *bang*, placed it before the guard.

“She’s shy. Could you not look so hard at her?”

“B-but that maid—”

“Isn’t the maid you’re looking for. Now take the bribe if you don’t wanna get killed.”

The guard kept silent. I was aghast.

Well, at least we got into the city, and we were only recognized as a rich sunglasses girl accompanied by three maids and another mysterious sunglasses girl. Cool.



All sorts of peoples lived in Carnalt, although Warblades were still the majority. There were stone sculptures of swords all over the place, too. Still very clearly the Gerra-Aruka Republic.

We reserved our rooms at the inn and then went for dinner.

The city was full of people who looked like they were out for a drink after work, and so our group, a bunch of girls very obviously there on a trip, caught their attention. They gave us curious looks every time we passed by, and then some guys showed up asking us to hang out (when we weren’t even friends in the first place?), and then Vill and Gertrude killed them. We ran away at full speed immediately, of course.

After all that, we finally arrived at the restaurant Nelia recommended.

It was a small place in a back alley, like a secret hideout. At first, I felt relieved we wouldn’t be seen there, but when we entered, and it was full of people. Nelia said it was all right, though. I didn’t know how, but then I saw omelet rice on the menu, and everything was okay.

“Now, let’s talk strategy,” Nelia said as soon as we sat down.

I didn’t care about that. There were TEN varieties of omelet rice in this place! The usual one with ketchup, then one with summer vegetables demi-glace, and one with mushrooms and white sauce... Oh shit, they even had omelet rice with hamburger steak!

“The Daydream Paradise is close. It’s just a walk away. Honestly, we were very

lucky to not run into any enemies on our way here. Let's keep our guard up as we go on."

"Lady Nelia, what will we do once we reach the Daydream Paradise?"

"We will expose its underground secrets. That's where Gerra-Aruka's dark side lays."

"What is this dark side?" Vill asked.

"They do human experimentation there."

"Hey, Vill, can I order anything I want?" I asked.

"Yes, order as you please... Testing on live people? Now that you mention it, Lady Amatsu said they were transporting Divine Instruments there. Could that be related?"

"Mmm...it's highly probable. I don't have the authority to enter the Daydream Paradise underground, so I'm not sure, but I know they're doing something involving Divine Instruments. Gertrude."

"Right...I've been there to investigate many times before, and I've heard the screams of people coming from the underground... They were shrieking in pain..., " the maid confirmed.

"I kinda wanna try the mushroom one, but I just can't get enough of the original, y'know? I think the steak one is a bit too much...but since we've come all the way here, might as well give it a try, don't you think?"

"Terrifying. Where are they getting those Divine Instruments from anyway?"

"Who knows. Maybe they're getting them from some terrorist group."

"Vill, can I order two? Wanna share yours with me?"

"Yes, let's share... There's something strange about this whole thing. Why would Madhart build a resort atop such a secret facility?"

"The Heavenly Paradise and the Enchanted Lands already had their doubts about what he was doing. I suppose he just did it as camouflage, as idiotic as it might be."

"Hmm..."

“Just know that Madhart’s a piece of shit. He sends anyone who opposes him there. He does as he pleases with the garrison and his secret police. The people can’t publicly criticize his actions.”

“I see. So it’s not an actual republic—it’s a dictatorship.”

“Exactly, and someone has to do something to save the Warblades from Madhart’s clutches. We’ve got to expose the Daydream Paradise’s secrets and force him to retreat, but I can’t do it by myself... As much as it pains to admit, the enemy is too powerful. I need your help. Terakomari Gandesblood...and Karla Amatsu.”

“Got it! I’m getting the mushroom omelet rice and the seafood omelet rice! That okay with you, Vill?”

“Komari...were you paying any attention?”

“Wuh? S-sorry, I was too focused on which to pick...”

“At least you’re honest! That’s what I like about you! Villhaze, please give her the details yourself later, okay?”

“I don’t like you giving me orders, but fine.”

“Good. Karla, were you listening? Please say you we—” Nelia stopped mid-sentence.

I turned to look at Karla as well. It was hard to tell due to her sunglasses, but she was sleeping upright. She was leaning on her chair and drooling, a telltale sign she was out.

Gertrude narrowed her eyes, then hit Karla on the head. She jolted awake.

“Bweh?! Wh-what ish it?! Morning already?!”

“You silly blockhead! Pay attention to what Lady Nelia is saying!” Gertrude shouted.

“Uh? Huuuh? Oh, I see. We were talking about dinner, right? Shall I cook tonight? Do you prefer your miso soup on the thicker side?”

“We’re in a restaurant, doofus!” Now it was Nelia hitting her.

I’d begun to notice it more and more, and... Karla really was just like me,

wasn't she? Though, our skills in battle couldn't be more different.

In any case, since neither of us had been listening, they repeated an abridged version of what they'd discussed for us.

I felt bad just hearing about it, but I was slightly taken aback to learn the truth behind the Gerra-Aruka Republic. Madhart was doing more terrible stuff than I imagined, although I'd known they had ill intentions from the start. You could tell by looking at Illustrious General Rainsworth and the discriminatory remarks he made. Then there was Madhart's imposing, aggressive tone when speaking to the Empress. A country led by men like them couldn't be good to its people.

"Lady Komari, the omelet rice is here."

"Really?! Hell yeah! Ah, but wait."

The food we ordered came in, piping hot. The omelet seemed so soft, and the sauce so creamy. The mushrooms looked scrumptious. But I froze, spoon in hand.

We were in the middle of a war, of the nonsport variety.

"I don't know if we should be eating this tasty-looking food while the defense team back at Faure is still fighting. We don't even know if the Seventh Unit guys are okay."

"I got a call from Captain Mellaconcey. He said they reunited with Lady Memoir and Lady Delphyne and are on their way to us. They fought enemy troops a couple times on their way, but they're still holding on."

"Oh...yeah, I feel bad about that."

"Why? You must eat whenever you can, or you won't have the energy when you most need it."

"Sure, and I'm also starving after nearly getting killed so many times."

"You will be fighting again tomorrow in any case, so you should eat more. Think of it as your last supper."

"Okay, I'm going home."

"How, exactly? The war is still going on back at Mulnite, too, might I remind

you.”

This was too much. How had things gotten this bad?

I wanted to quit being a commander right that moment. I’d rather be Nelia’s maid. Yeah, and then even if there were battles the next day, I’d just stay back as support. Like a cheerleader. A much better job for me.

“Um... I’ve been finding this weird the whole time, but, uh, are you not aware of how powerful you are, Komari?”

“Not aware? Yeah, you might be right. Perhaps I have this great power hidden within me. The ability to write even better novels. Indeed, that’s what I pray for every time I pick up my pen.”

“...Novels? No, I’m not talking about wri—”

The restaurant door slammed open, cutting Nelia off. I was startled and ended up dropping my spoon on the floor. I wanted to cry. I grabbed a napkin and stooped down to try and clean the mess, but someone suddenly yelled, and I was startled again.

“Nobody move! We’re the garrison!”

You could cut through the tension in the air with a knife. All diners stared in silence at the new guests.

They were wearing Gerra-Arukan uniforms. The garrison—the government organization that cracked down on criminals. I had a bad feeling about this. Had they already found us? I remained stiff in panic while the garrison entered and openly approached us. Vill stealthily held a kunai in hand. Gertrude gripped a knife behind her back. Nelia rested her head on her hand as she observed the enemies. Karla was hiding beneath the table, but her butt was in plain view.

“It’s you! You’re the ones defying Madhart, aren’t you?!”

Oh crap. They totally got us...

“N-no! That wasn’t our intention! Please!” The guys at the table next to us stood up in a panic.

The garrison wasn’t having it. The thugs clicked their tongues and ran away, but that same moment, a spell activated, and they tripped. The soldiers tied

them up with mana ropes immediately. They were well trained.

“Stop it! We didn’t do anything!”

“Bullshit. You spread those flyers slandering the Madhart administration. We will hear no excuses. Under Gerra-Aruka Law, article 20503, you are to be immediately relocated to the Daydream Paradise.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding! This ain’t Aruka; we’re in the Dark Core Zone! You don’t have the authori—” The man’s body jolted as though electrified. He lost consciousness right away and fell lifelessly to the floor.

The group of men were dragged away like bags of garbage as the soldiers disappeared into the night, not showing the slightest care about the diners’ fearful stares.

I couldn’t say anything. Nelia clicked her tongue and crossed her arms.

“Now you see Aruka’s current situation. I can’t be sure, but it’s very likely whatever they did wasn’t any serious crime. Yet just because the law says it’s forbidden, they send out the garrison for them. Now they’re getting thrown into the Daydream Paradise camp.”

“There’s something clearly wrong with this country,” Karla whispered from below the table.

I was sure everyone agreed with her. This country’s president was rotten. I didn’t know what Madhart was thinking; surely he had some reason to create this dystopia, but it probably wasn’t a good one. This was wrong.

“The time for our final battle approaches. Let’s go to sleep early tonight and rest up. We’ll need the energy tomorrow. We will leave at five in the morning,” Nelia said with a serious expression.

Her eyes were ablaze. Shining with ire toward Gerra-Aruka.



I woke up at ten in the morning.

“WHY?!”

I jumped out of bed. Nelia said we would leave at five. I was SO late. Maybe they already left me behind. I looked around in panic and saw my sicko maid

resting her head on her hand as she looked out the window.

“The summer breeze is so nice...”

“I agree, but c’mon, wake me up! We’re late!”

“Come here, Lady Komari. There’s something funny going on outside.”

“Who cares?! I gotta go apologize to Nelia...”

“Now that is something that doesn’t matter. Please just come here.”

“What? Is there a festival going on or something?”

I got curious and went to take a look out the window.

It sure was a jamboree out there. Gerra-Aruka soldiers were doing rounds around the inn. I reflexively pulled my head away, jumped back into the bed, and hid beneath the sheets. *I’m still asleep, yeah. This is all a dream. This ain’t happening in reality.*

“Lady Komari, we’re surrounded.”

“What a bad dream, huh?”

“It appears Commander Rainsworth has come to the inn. They’re already looking for us in here. Oh, did you just hear that? They just blasted a door open.”

I did hear a thunderous slam, plus the screams and yells that followed.

There was no looking away from reality anymore. I jumped out of bed, walked up to my maid, then stared at her from a close distance and screamed: “What now?! How did they find us?! We gotta split!”

“I knew you would say that, which is why I already changed you into your uniform.”

“And didn’t you think of running away with me while you were at it, at least?! Gosh, stop changing my clothes while I’m asleep!”

Then the door slammed open. I shrieked and hid behind Vill. *It’s over.* I resigned myself to death, but then I realized it wasn’t the Aruka army that had broken in. It was Karla Amatsu, wearing a different kimono from the day before.

“Ms. Gandesblood! There are enemies outside!”

“I know that! What do we do, Vill?!”

“I think the best course of action would be to have Lady Amatsu get rid of them with her immense power.”

“H-hold up. If I tried to use my immense power, it wouldn’t just blow our enemies away—the whole city would be demolished. I think we should leave this battle up to Ms. Gandesblood.”

“Don’t be stupid! Forget about the city, I would blow up the entire Dark Core Zone if I used my full power!”

“Allow me to correct myself! I didn’t mean the city—I meant the whole world! With my full power, the entire planet—gone!”

“Oh, I got that wrong, too! I meant my full power would turn the entire universe to ashes! That’s the *universe*! Nothing bigger than that! So give up!”

“Ha! The universe? Hilarious! My full power could easily tear apart the entire space-time continuum and throw the laws of the universe into complete catastrophe! How about that?!”

“How about you just don’t use your full power?” Vill said.

““ ... ””

Then we heard chaos and sounds of destruction from the lower floors. Rainsworth was destroying the inn as he pleased. It was only a matter of time before he got to us.

A bell chimed. “Fine,” Karla said. “Arguing isn’t constructive. Let’s talk with Ms. Cunningham first.”

“R-right! Where’s Nelia?!”

“She’s sleeping.”

“NELIA, TOO?!”

Weren’t we leaving at five?! I already knew she had a hard time getting up in the morning, but c’mon, of all days! What is Gertrude doing?! Not that I had any right to roast her.

Karla and I dashed out the room and knocked on Nelia's door. No answer. She really was still asleep. What now?!

"Step aside, Lady Komari!"

"Huh? Whoa!"

Vill pulled a giant hammer out of nowhere and slammed the door with it. The wood creaked, and the door bent before flying away. *Who's paying for that? Hmm, I guess the Gerra-Aruka army. Yeah.*

We entered the room and couldn't believe our eyes.

Gertrude was snoozing on the bed. As was her mistress.

I screamed and jumped on Nelia.

"Nelia, c'mon! This isn't the time to be sleeping; the enemy's here!"

"Mm... You have to peel the banana..."

"What are you talking about?! Wake up!!"

I grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her like crazy. She slowly opened her eyelids.

"...Fweh? Komari? Wh-what are you doing in my bed?!"

"We're in trouble! The Gerra-Aruka army found us!"

"WH-WHAT?!" She rose up in panic, but then she thought for a while before saying, "No, that can't be! No one knows we're here! We were disguised the whole time!"

"I only realized this after waking up, but there's no way those stupid disguises worked! Someone must've reported us! We've gotta run; we're gonna get killed!"

"But it wasn't just the disguises! To tell the truth, Gertrude also used camouflage magic..."

"Oh geez! Would you look at yourself, Nelia?" came a man's voice.

I turned around, chills shooting down my spine. The lizard-like man was standing by the door. Pascal Rainsworth. The Illustrious General who'd attacked

us in Faure.

“You look quite fine in that nightgown. Though I think pink would suit you better than blue.”

“Shut it, creep. Want to get your mouth sawed off?”

“Foulmouthed as always. I wonder how long you’ll be able to keep up the bravado. President Madhart is searching for you under suspicion of conspiring to overthrow the government. You have nowhere to run.”

“So what? I’m not going back to him.”

“You’re coming back with me. Not that you’re a criminal, it’s perfectly legal for me to subdue you with force. Let this be an opportunity to remind yourself of who’s in charge here.”

Is there nowhere we can go? I looked around.

Nelia pulled a dagger out of thin air and threw it. It nearly brushed my cheek as it flew toward Rainsworth. He cleanly wielded his sword to strike it down.

Fireworks sparked with a high-pitched *clank*.

My eyes couldn’t keep up. Nelia and Rainsworth were already clashing swords by the time I realized. With each strike, the bed, the closet, the chandelier, the flower vases, and the paintings on the wall—everything around me was being sliced apart.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Not bad for having just woken up!”

“Get up, Gertrude! We’re retreating!”

Nelia grabbed her sleeping maid by the arm and jumped through the window. The glass shattered loudly as they escaped... *Wait, we’re on the third floor!!*

“Lady Komari, we must run, too!”

“Huh? Wai—!”

Vill threw a smoke bomb. The same man-killing gas she’d used back at the Crimson Match. It quickly filled the whole room.

In the darkness before me, I could hear shrieks and yells: “What’s this?!” “You sneaky little...!” “Damn it!”

I walked a few steps not knowing what I should do, when suddenly Vill grabbed me bridal-style and jumped out the window.

“D-don’t leave me behind! Is this the exit?!”

Karla jumped out, too.

It ended before I could let out a scream. Vill landed gracefully, as if going against gravity. Karla crashed into the ground with a comical bang.

...Oof. Is she okay? She fell right on her face. She’s not moving.

“Let’s go, Lady Komari! We must catch up to Lady Cunningham!”

“Hold on! We can’t leave Karla there!”

“She’s dead, so let’s go.”

“She’s dead?!”

What did she even come here for? Wasn’t she the strongest Imperial Saber? Those thoughts dissipated immediately, for Rainsworth and his men had survived the gas and jumped out the window. *Shoot, they’re fast!*

There weren’t many people out in the streets in the morning, but the few who were awake looked out their windows and yelled as they saw us run away.

“It’s Commander Komarin!” “And that’s Commander Nelia!” “Good luck, girls!” “Run for it!”

This ain’t no game, guys! Don’t look so happy about it!

“Weird,” muttered Vill.

“What’s weird?! You mean those guys weren’t men after all?!”

“No, I think they were just tough enough to survive. Ah, that’s not it... I find it strange that the Gerra-Aruka army got hold of our location so fast.”

“Maybe they used magic or something, I don’t know! Magic’s like the power of deus ex machina in real life, isn’t it?!”

“No, magic isn’t that convenient. Last night, Ms. Gertrude’s camouflage spell helped cover our faces. I did check, and it was working properly, so there’s no way someone could have reported us.”

“Huh? Wait, then I didn’t need to dress up, did I? Why was I made to put on that maid outfit?”

“Because Lady Cunningham is a sicko. I won’t deny I wanted to see you in that uniform, however.”

“You BOTH are sickos!!”

Then a flame spell flew at us from behind at great speeds.

Vill dodged it by a hair. The store where we bought *ramune* the day before burst into flames.

I feel like I’ve been seeing too many explosions lately. I wonder why. I mean, besides being surrounded by freaking bombers.

“Komari! We can’t go up against Rainsworth’s Fourth Unit by ourselves! We gotta lose them!” Nelia shouted as she ran in front of us.

How exactly were we supposed to lose them? They were running like crazy after us. I could already feel myself getting snatched up and thrown into the Daydream Paradise.

“Take this! Advanced-level blade spell: *Razor Rain!*”

I felt dense mana from behind me and turned around. At the same time, Rainsworth’s sword shot what seemed to be an endless barrage of slashes. Vill immediately changed course, and the mana blades lost their target and sliced the houses, shops, streetlights, and the people in their path. However, Vill failed to evade one of them, and it shallowly slashed her ankle.

“Guh!”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Die, vampire! You could never hope to stand up to a Warblade!”

She lost her balance, and I fell out of her arms and rolled over the pavement. It hurt. It hurt, but Vill must’ve been in more pain. I turned to her and tried calling out to her, when Rainsworth unleashed a second attack.

Vill kept a knee on the ground as she brandished her kunai, blocking the mana blades. Rainsworth looked for an opening and stepped forward. She instantly knew she was in danger and raised her hip, but the pain in her ankle was too

much, and she fell to the ground.

“One less filthy vampire to worry about!”

He swung his long sword.

Vill was about to get killed.

I...I...

“I won’t let you!!”

“Komari! What are you doing?!” Nelia yelled from afar.

My body moved on its own. It was stupid, and I knew it. I knew that nothing would change even if I acted, but I couldn’t let my maid get slashed in two right before my eyes.

I stood before her and stared at the lizard-eyed man.

Vill yelled something, but I couldn’t hear it. *Ah...so this is how I will die for the first time.* That was the only thought in my head.

But the pain didn’t come, even though I was prepared for it.

“Guh... What—what’s happening?! It won’t move!” Rainsworth groaned.

A red whiplike thing was wrapped around his sword.

I could never forget the sight of that spell. There was only one person I knew who used such unpleasant magic.

“Rusted bastards. You won’t get away with your nonsense any longer.”

“D-Delphyne?!”

I was in shock. On top of the weapon shop’s roof stood the mysterious masked vampire...Crimson Lord Delphyne. Her Fourth Unit was right there, too. They were all wearing masks, like some sort of circus troupe. Behind them was a Peace Spirit army. Likely Karla’s.

“Like damn cockroaches, one after the other!”

“The only cockroach here is you. Now die.”

Delphyne shot a barrage of knives from the wound on her arm.

I really didn't get how she wasn't flinching in pain from her magic...but anyway, the knives were fast and powerful. Rainsworth had to fully concentrate on parrying the coagulation spell, so he set me free. He immediately looked at his men, though, and yelled: "What are you doing?! Kill Terakomari Gandesblood! She's the leader of the Mul-Heaven Alliance! I'll reward whoever gets her!"

The Warblades yelled in excitement and jumped after me, but they were stopped right away. Another group attacked them from the side with amazing speed. It wasn't Delphyne's troops.

The next moment, annoying...but reassuring ovation exploded.

"Commander!" "Commander Komarin!" "We finally caught up to you!" "It's murder time!" "Bwa-ha-ha-ha! I've been waiting for this moment!" "Time to kill all the Warblades and make chopsticks out of them!"

They were the Seventh Unit madmen. They killed Rainsworth's soldiers one after the other, their eyes bloodshot. Once again, a terrible engagement played out right before me. Taking even one step forward would probably kill me in a second.

"Commander! Are you all right?" Bellius said as he approached alongside Caostel.

They were already soaked in the enemy's blood, which I could excuse, but I really wish they wouldn't come near me with the enemy's head in their hands.

"Commander, Gerra-Aruka's official statements says you've colluded with Nelia Cunningham to overthrow their government—is that correct?"

"Y-yeah, pretty much."

"Understood. Then we'll also join the slaughter. Bellius! Let's see who can kill more!"

"Heh. A bit of competition is good once in a while. You'll buy me a drink if I win."

They dove into the chaos. As rambunctious as ever. Where was Yohann, though? Dead? Oh right, he got killed a while ago.

“Ms. Komari! Are you okay?!” Another familiar voice called out to me.

I looked into the distance in shock. Behind the Seventh Unit was the silver vampire. My junior, Crimson Lord Sakuna Memoir. She was holding her precious, giant magic staff in hand, briskly running toward me.

“S-Sakunaaa! Why are you here?!”

“I hurried after you. Ms. Delphyne and I are part of the attack group, after all.”

“U-uooooooooohhh!! Thank youuuu, Sakunaaaaaaa!”

“Eep! U-um, Ms. Komari?! Fwaaaah!”

I was overcome with emotion and clung to her tight. *I’m so happy! They saved my life! By a hair! Just in time! Bestie!*

Then I felt a subzero stare stab into back. It was Vill, glaring at me with a pout.

“Lady Komari...don’t you have anything to say to me?”

“R-right! Is your foot all right, Vill?!”

“Yes. The Dark Core already healed it. But what I mean is that your maid just nearly gave her life to protect you. Don’t you have something else to say to her? Perhaps a reward? A hug or something?”

“Ugh... R-right. You’re right.”

“Ms. Komari, now’s not the time for that.” Vill froze as Sakuna spoke. “We’re in the middle of the battlefield...and there’s something else you must take care of.”

“What?”

“The Daydream Paradise. Leave this place to us and head over there. Hee-hee...I’ve always wanted to say something like that.”

Sakuna smiled and gripped her staff tight.

You know they usually end up dead when they say that sort of line, right?

Sakuna was correct, though. Nelia and I had to go to that hellish resort...the Daydream Paradise.



Six Nations News, July 26th Morning Edition

PRETTY MESSED-UP SITUATION GOING ON IN THE GERRA-ARUKA REPUBLIC

IMPERIAL CAPITAL—BY THIO FLATT

The Mulnite government announced on the 25th that they have annihilated and captured the Second and Third Units of the Gerra-Aruka Republic Army, which launched an attack on the fortress city of Faure. Her Majesty, the Empress Karen Helvetius, is leading the commanders at Faure and showing great results. The armies of the Haku-Goku Commonwealth and Lapelico Kingdom, which allied with the Gerra-Aruka Republic, are having trouble fighting back.

...

President Madhart recalled part of his troops in the Dark Core Zone back to the capital after the executive office was bombed. People both inside and outside Aruka are starting to show their dissatisfaction with the Madhart administration, and protests by the radicals in their capital have begun to take a turn for the worse. The capital defense supervisor, Commander Salt Aquinas, leads the garrison in trying to control the population, but it is obvious to everyone that those measures are only shortening the reign of the current administration. Gerra-Aruka might fall at any moment, so hang in there!



The capital was in a revolutionary fervor.

The flyers calling for the end of Madhart's reign inspired the Warblades to stand up in rebellion overnight. Moreover, the news said the Mul-Heaven Alliance had the advantage over the Gerra-Aruka army. A mysterious terrorist had blown the executive office to bits. Despite the gravity of the situation, the president was nowhere to be found.

The bottled-up discontent came to a head. The people rallied at the ruins of the executive office and loudly criticized Madhart.

"Madhart must retreat!"

"Stop needless war!"

“Stop oppressing the people with excessive laws!”

“Amazing. To think we might get to see the moment Gerra-Aruka falls.”

The silver-haired journalist Melka Tiano sipped her coffee as she observed the citizens clashing with the garrison from afar. The coffee shop was because of the protests. It wasn't even open, in fact. She had sneaked in and prepared the drink for herself without permission.

Isn't this theft? Thio thought as she munched on the cheesecake she'd grabbed from the fridge. It was tasty, but she felt immense guilt. She wanted to go home before anyone caught them.

“Um, Ms. Melka, why are we here in Aruka? We're from the Mulnite branch, aren't we? Let's go home and have some fried shrimp over there, yes?”

“Mulnite is involved, so this is still our job. The Gerra-Aruka correspondents can't write for shit, so we have to go where the scoop is.”

“...What is your aim, exactly?”

“Create the world with my pen. That's all!”

The ones 'creating' the world would be those actually involved out there, not the people reporting on it... Thio didn't say it out loud, though, because there was a fifty-fifty chance Melka would either click her tongue or smack her in the face.

The cat-eared girl wanted to quit her job and go back to her hometown ASAP. Then she would start her own business. She'd get to be the boss, leave the work to her employees, and rake in all the cash.

“You see, we must record the moment the world changes. We have to get a picture of when the Gerra-Aruka Republic falls and spread it to the whole world.”

“That's impossible! Besides, everyone thinks of Six Nations News as partially fictitious...”

“Don't worry. We might mostly write unfounded bullshit, but not this time. HQ just sent us our secret weapon.”

Melka then placed, with great fanfare, a huge camera on the table.

The heck is this? Thio thought, opening her eyes wide.

“This is a high-spec camera called the electrovideo box. With this, we can stream live on the screens all over the main cities of the six nations and the Dark Core Zone. It’s an ultrarare Divine Instrument. One of a kind!”

Thio couldn’t understand why a bunch of dummies like them had obtained such a rare item. Was Six Nations News actually a hugely terrifying organization?

She didn’t get it. The news outlet now held both of them in high regard for their courage and initiative. The director had even posted a list of “Top Up-and-Coming Rookies” on the internal bulletin board, and both of them were ranked at top of that ridiculous yet glorious document.

“And how do you use it? We would have to pay for it if we break it, wouldn’t we?”

“You use it like this.”

Melka placed the electrovideo box on her shoulder and poured mana into it. The lens’s light glowed green.

The silver-haired journalist grinned and said, “I’m gonna show the whole world that you’re eating stolen cake!”

“Whaaaaaaat?! No, stop it pleaaaaaaaaaaase!”

In an instant, a catgirl stuffing her cheeks with cake showed up on screens all over the world. Thio hurriedly grabbed the electrovideo box and pointed it elsewhere. Melka started cackling and cut off the mana link. The lens’s light went off.

“How am I supposed to get married now?! I’m going to be thrown into prison!”

“Those two are basically the same thing. Anyway, time to work.”

“Please just let me finish the cake first.”

“This ain’t the time for snacking! You’re not even ashamed of stealing, are you?!” Melka hit Thio’s head. That was unfair; she was a burglar, too. “We’ve gotta go get that decisive piece of evidence! You can eat cake later!”

“Well, the protests are right there. Let’s record that and go home already.”

“Anyone could record that. We need something bigger, something riskier!”

Melka took out a piece of paper—the flyer a spy from Mulnite had spread throughout the capital. Thio remembered it basically saying, “Madhart is a piece of shit,” just in a more verbose manner.

Melka pointed at one sentence and read it out loud. “*Innocent people are being held in the Daydream Paradise*. We’ve gotta go, don’t you think?”

“I mean, it’s not like we *need* to go.”

“WE DO!!” Melka slapped her again.

Now *this* was injustice. Thio decided to write her resignation letter that same day.



“Our enemies are awfully energetic again today,” the Mulnite Empress whispered as she looked down at the battlefield from the city wall.

A full day had passed since the battle began. Two of Gerra-Aruka’s units had been defeated already, but the losses on their side were great as well. Aruka’s blade magic had impaled half of the Heavenly Paradise’s forces, and the number of wounded in both Flöte’s and Heldeus’s units were starting to increase.

“Your Majesty, we have a letter from the Goddess of the Heavenly Paradise. It appears to be intel on the enemy forces.”

Her vampire escort handed over an envelope. The letter was penned in exotic ink and handwriting. The Empress read it in less than three seconds, then crossed her arms and looked up at the sky.

The protests at the Gerra-Aruka capital had brought about unexpected results.

The Gerra-Aruka Army’s current situation was as followed:

First Unit: Nelia Cunningham → Betrayed the Republic and is acting alongside Komari (unit soldiers all defeated) Second Unit: Nelson Case → Assaulted Faure (now defeated)

Third Unit: Audacious Claim → Assaulted Faure (now defeated)

Fourth Unit: Pascal Rainsworth → Battling the attack team at Carnalt

Fifth Unit: Abercrombie → Defending the Daydream Paradise

Sixth Unit: Mary Fragment → Assaulted Faure (currently in battle)

Seventh Unit: Salt Aquinas → Returned to the mainland to protect the capital

Eighth Unit: Under investigation (protecting the capital?)

Besides the Gerra-Aruka Army, some of the Haku-Goku Commonwealth and Lapelico Kingdom troops had also attacked Faure. The situation looked dire... but the rest of the world had begun to find out about Madhart's dark side, so the Empress didn't believe they would launch another fierce attack. In fact, the Enchanted Lands had turned down Gerra-Aruka's invitation and remained neutral. Now they just had to wait for Komari, Nelia, and Karla Amatsu to expose the Daydream Paradise's secrets.

"Your Majesty, will our army be all right?"

"Yes. We might not if the number of enemy troops increases, but that doesn't seem likely."

Below them, Helldesus was killing beast-folk with his bare fists. Flöte was unleashing the full extent of her dark magic, too. The Peace Spirits' troops were wounded, but they didn't turn back.

"No problem. It's all good. Once Sakuna and Delphyne beat Rainsworth's troops and reunite with Komari, Madhart will have nowhere to run."



The Mulnite Empress's guess was a tad bit off the mark.

The people of Gerra-Aruka were the blade-folk—a race who got all they wanted through war. Vampires tended to kill for fun, but the Warblades were rational and ambitious, cold and firm as steel. They were more specialized in killing than the vampires.

The fortress city of Carnalt was silent.

Even the onlookers, staring from inside their windows, were unbelievably

quiet.

The place was filled with the repulsive stench of death.

The streets were dyed in red; it was impossible to tell their original color from the sheer amount of blood. Corpses were piled up high all over. Vampires, Warblades, and Peace Spirits alike had expired. Even the masked and the silver-haired Crimson Lords lay still alongside their subordinates within the pools of blood.

Only one man was standing among the tragedy.

“You’ve taken up far too much of my time...you filthy vampires!”

Pascal Rainsworth wiped the blood off his blade and sheathed it.

His eyes were tinted a horrific scarlet. Not bloodshot—it was the effect of his power, which went above the laws of physics. Core Implosion.

Rainsworth clicked his tongue and walked away. His Fourth Unit was annihilated, leaving only him...but he was unharmed. He came out spotless, and victorious.

He’d lost some time in battle, but not enough to be unable to catch up to Nelia and Gandesblood.

They were heading for the Daydream Paradise, where Illustrious General Abercrombie’s unit was stationed. There was no way they could break through with such small numbers.

Then his Correspondence Crystal glowed. It was time for his periodic report. He poured in mana and picked up the call.

“Something happen?”

“No. Nelia Cunningham will arrive at the Daydream Paradise in an hour.”

“Got it. I’ll go after them right away.”

He hung up.

What he had to do was simple. Abercrombie’s army would attack them from the front, then he would attack from behind, and that would be it for Nelia. Once her hopes were crushed, she would lose any will to live. Then he would

approach her with sweet words and melt the coldness surrounding her heart with ease.

After that, they would simply have to reorganize their army and attack the Mulnite Empire again.

Protests were taking place back at the capital, but the fools merely had to be silenced with force. The reason why they managed to stand up against Madhart, besides reading Mulnite's flyers, was because the executive office's bombing made it seem like his power was weakening. But the Republic just had to show them how strong they still were by conquering the Mulnite Empire and the Heavenly Paradise.

Suddenly, someone grabbed his ankle.

It was the silver vampire, drenched in blood as she looked up at him. Crimson Lord Sakuna Memoir. That dirty little girl had been absolved of her crimes despite having been involved with Inverse Moon and still had the gall to remain a commander.

"I won't let you...follow Ms. Komari..."

"Enough of your blabbering."

"I won't let you go. You will...stay here..."

"I said shut the hell up!"

Rainsworth drew his sword and stabbed the girl in the abdomen. A tremendous amount of blood spewed from her mouth, and yet her eyes showed no sign of weakening resolve. This bothered him to no end.

"There is no hope for you! Terakomari Gandesblood's life is over! Abercrombie's troops will take care of that! You vampires will become slaves to us Warblades; there's no saving you from that!"

"Abercrombie...? Heh, I've heard that name."

"Surely. He's the third best Illustrious General, next to me and Nelia."

"Yes, maybe. I won't deny he was a strong opponent...but in the end, I won."

"What...?"

“I won’t lose. Even in death, I’ll keep going.”

Rainsworth felt chills down his spine. An incomprehensible eeriness took over his mind.

In just the blink of an eye—literally—Sakuna Memoir’s pupils glowed red.

He acted on instinct; he brought his sword down on her right hand and severed it.

Painful shrieking followed. He paid it no mind; he didn’t have the patience.

Rainsworth left Carnalt, still feeling uneasy, however.

“You will not...get away with this.”

Her last groan was drowned out by the summer wind.

He failed to pay attention to one more thing. Something he had ignored, thinking it’d been a dead body from the very beginning—but she was not dead. The Dark Core’s power had kept her barely alive. The girl in kimono near the inn.

She stood up.

Her eyes were empty, like a starless night sky. Her entire body hurt, and her head felt heavy. Her vision was also blurry. It all felt like a dream. There was blood everywhere. *Why, oh, why do people take on this dirty color? With my power, I could make it all prettier. Cleaner.*

Then a shadow appeared beside her. The leader of Kidoshu, Karla Amatsu’s ninja squad.

“Lady Karla, your bell fell off.”

“Bell? Ah, my little chime.”

She only noticed after Koharu told her. The chime her dear brother had gifted her was lying on the ground. Thank goodness it was there. She couldn’t live without it.

Koharu picked it up and handed it over, and Karla tied it back on again.

It tinkled gracefully, and the world changed. Light returned to her pitch-black eyes.

“...Fweh? Wha—? Wh-what happened?! Oh no, my kimono’s drenched in blood!”

“The Aruka general killed everyone. It’s a sea of blood.”

“K-Koharu?! Where were you up to now?!”

“I was looking for you.”

“Took you long enough! But thank you! I love you.” She hugged her tight.

“You’re suffocating me,” said the ninja with a frown. “I also have a message from the Goddess. She says to join Terakomari and Nelia and head for the Daydream Paradise.”

“Huh?” Karla grimaced. “...The mission is still going on? I’ve worked so hard already, almost to the point of death. Actually, didn’t I die once?”

“You did not. Lady Karla, it is a warrior’s duty to follow the Goddess’s orders. And other people from the Heavenly Paradise are already there; you must go help them.”

“...”

“Please, Lady Karla.” Koharu looked at her with pure, innocent eyes. There was no way she could reject her.

The Amatsus were a line of warriors. No matter how inept she was at combat, Karla had to do her job as a commander. Besides, as a pacifist, she couldn’t overlook what Gerra-Aruka had done. That kind of demonic evil called for divine retribution.

Karla slowly stood up, her chime sounding as she placed a hand on Koharu’s head.

“Very well. I will do everything I can as an Imperial Saber. I have the wisdom to fight without force...but if I do end up in a pickle, then come rescue me. Okay, Koharu?”



I heard the calm waves after walking for a while.

The vast ocean spread out before me. The sun shone bright. I could smell the

sea salt. I got a bit giddy despite the situation, I must admit. Though, as childish as that might be, at least I wasn't stupid enough to actually tell everyone to go in for a swim.

The only diving I had to do—I *could* do—was into the Daydream Paradise. The particulars of why and how we were getting there still escaped me, but according to Nelia, if we managed to expose its secrets to all the nations, the world would be saved.

“And how do we ‘expose’ ‘em? Do we, like, take a picture?”

“That, too, but first we must save the prisoners. They will be our witnesses.”

“And then Madhart’s administration will have no way of escaping the criticism,” Vill said.

“Exactly. Then we just make some threats. Tell him to withdraw his troops if he doesn’t want us to reveal the truth to the whole world. And once the army has retreated, we go after him.”

Nelia spoke with great confidence as we walked through the woods, ignoring the sea. There was a trail, likely the route my guys had taken when they were playing “beach flags.”

“Lady Cunningham, I believe there was a base right before the Daydream Paradise. Gerra-Aruka’s troops must be waiting for us.”

“Yeah, they must be Illustrious General Abercrombie’s, who’s in charge of defending the place. They say whoever faces the guy ends up like chopped onions.”

“Lady Komari, the path is over here.” Vill grabbed me by the arm and brought me back into position.

“Don’t worry. I wouldn’t lose in a one-on-one match, but even then we don’t need to go in from the front. Let’s just sneak in like ninja without them knowing.” Nelia was speaking very optimistically.

We walked a bit more until I caught whiff of a strange smell in the wind.

“...Don’t you smell blood?”

“Huh? No, not at all.”

“We are more sensitive to the smell, as vampires... Oh, look. Abercrombie’s unit has been annihilated,” Vill said.

““““Wha—?”””” Nelia, Gertrude, and I said in unison.

From outside the forest, we could see the Gerra-Aruka Republic’s base where Abercrombie’s unit was stationed. The soldiers’ bodies were piled up in a pool of blood.

I couldn’t understand what was going on, but Vill did.

“It appears they killed one another. This was likely Lady Memoir’s doing.”

“Sakuna did this? She was here?”

“No, you see, the Sixth Unit was made to fight multiple wars as punishment for what happened, and most of them were against Gerra-Aruka’s troops. During that time, Lady Memoir killed Abercrombie, and it was then that she used her Core Implosion.”

“...”

Ah, dreadful. This reminded me how truly terrifying Sakuna was.

Then I saw it. Just for a short instant, Gertrude frowned. It didn’t seem to be out of fear or disgust toward the mountain of corpses. No...she looked annoyed.

“How lucky! Now we get to go inside the Daydream Paradise without trouble. Good job on Sakuna Memoir’s part. Maybe I should make her my servant, too.”

“I’m not letting you do that. She’s my friend.”

“Any friend of yours is a servant of mine.”

I legitimately couldn’t tell if that was a joke or not. In any case, at least we didn’t have to fight now. I felt bad for Abercrombie, but hey.

Nelia stepped over the corpses and bravely kept on walking. Right past the now-deserted base was the resort...or rather, its ruins, thanks to what my guys had done. They hadn’t finished cleaning up the rubble of what once was the hotel.

“Gertrude...where do you think the entrance to the underground is?”

“Bweh? I—I don’t know... Oh, but there’s a staircase here.”

She cleared away some of the rubble, and there it was. She was impressively strong...but there was something fishier about her than her physical prowess. How did she realize there was a stairway right there? Did she have X-ray vision or something? Oh well, no use thinking about it, I guess.

“Good job, Gertrude. No need to blow up the surface of this place now.”

Nelia went down the stairs. Did she have no sense of fear? Gertrude followed, fearless as well, so I had to do the same.

The stairs were narrow. We had to go down in a line, in the following order: Nelia, then Gertrude, then me, and finally Vill.

It was dark. There didn't seem to be anyone around, save for an eerie wind coming from below. It smelled like something had gone bad down there. I instinctively grabbed Vill's arm without shame—that was how scared I was.

“How about we talk about fun stuff, Vill?”

“Yes, let's go to the beach once we're back. I'll teach you how to swim.”

“Y-yeah... Pretty reasonable answer, huh? I was expecting something funnier.”

“I'm doing my best.”

“Hey, did you use that thing to see the future?”

“There was no time to do that. Besides, there's no way of getting a Warblade to drink my blood... Vampire blood is like poison to them. Their bodies rust away.”

“First I've heard about that... Okay...then I'll drink it. I don't like it, but I'll gulp it down.”

“No.” She didn't hesitate. The frank rejection almost made my eyes well up.

Vill looked around, a serious expression on her face.

The only thing on my mind was the shock of rejection.

You let Sakuna drink it. Why not me? What's so bad about me?

“Sorry...I just can't let you do something you don't like. Please don't cry; it's not because I don't want you to suck my blood. I could suck yours instead if you

want.”

“I-I’m not crying! And don’t just aim for my neck! Shoo!”

“I’m sorry,” she said again, unexpressive.

That weirdly calmed me down, but there was nothing to be relieved about in the first place. It wasn’t as if sucking her blood would kill me. It didn’t matter... but then I remembered it totally did; we wouldn’t get to see the future to avoid my likely death. I steeled my resolve and tried biting her wrist, but she pushed my lips with her index finger and said, “Bad girl.” My face turned red. I really couldn’t understand why she didn’t want me to drink her blood despite always forcing me to eat those pesky peppers.

After all that, we arrived at an underground room.

“There’s people here. This...is the Daydream Paradise,” Nelia said.

“...!” The shock made me cling to Vill’s arm again.

It was a huge prison complex. I half expected that...but the place was larger than the Mulnite Imperial Palace garden, and it had a seemingly endless amount of jail cells. Inside them were people—lots of them. Mostly Warblades, but there were people of other races, too. They were cowering inside their cells, but once they saw us arrive, they ran toward the bars, foaming at the mouth.

“You! You’re Nelia...Nelia Cunningham!”

Commotion followed. Everyone looked at us.

Nelia approached one of the cells with a tense look on her face.

“I am Nelia. Don’t worry, I’m here to rescue you.”

“Run away now! You’ll die if you stay here!”

“You... you’re that public speaker who got caught last month for criticizing Madhart. What were they doing to you in here? What is this Daydream Paradise?”

“Well...” He cast his eyes down, squinting. “I don’t know the details. All the people on this floor are prisoners who were recently caught. But they are doing

as they please with everyone they bring here. I don't mean forcing us to work; no, that would be too kind. They're experimenting on us. Look." He showed us his arm, revealing fresh wounds. "They're testing how fast the Dark Core heals us. Every day, they beat up everyone in here and then let us be. Then they wait for us to heal again."

The others looked equally wounded. There were people with slashes all over their bodies, people on the floor in puddles of blood, and people who had died, their hearts crushed. I wanted to throw up. I'd seen lots of injured people like this since becoming a commander, but this was too much. This didn't happen in usual war. This was evil.

"Where is my father...the former king?"

"I don't know. Perhaps farther in...but it would be best not to hope for anything."

Nelia looked shaken, but immediately she gripped her twin swords.

"I'll save you. We will defeat Rainsworth and Madhart."

"No! Rainsworth's eyes glow scarlet! Not even you can defeat him..."

"Fear not! I will change Aruka! Keep quiet and follow me!" She turned to me. "Komari! I will look at the other floors. I must see the entirety of Gerra-Aruka's evils. Let's go, Gertrude."

She ran farther inside, taking her maid along, before I could stop her.

I was paralyzed, but then Vill grabbed my hand.

"Lady Komari, we mustn't go our separate ways in enemy territory. Let's follow Lady Cunningham."

"Y-yeah..."

We went farther down, and that floor was even worse.

There was an endless supply of weapons hanging on the walls, and not normal weapons—Divine Instruments.

There were prison cells on both sides of the hallway. Many of the prisoners were young, mostly in their teens and twenties, both men and women. They

were wounded all over, their breathing faint. Their injuries were much deeper than those of the upper floor, and they showed no sign of healing. They'd been harmed using Divine Instruments.

"They're out of their damn minds! Unhinged, insane bastards!" Nelia screamed. She was right.

Vill looked around and said, "It seems they were experimenting with Divine Instruments here."

"Experimenting? Are you trying to say there's a point to inflicting all this pain?"

"On rare occasions, wounds inflicted by Divine Instruments develop the victim's spirit more, allowing them to obtain Core Implosion—or so they say. I think I heard that from Lady Memoir."

"Why would they do that?" I asked.

"Simple. Core Implosion gives you the power to bore through the land and move stars. Madhart must want it to take over the world. Anyhow, we should look for the keys. We must save everyone," Nelia said with a spiteful tone, then walked away.

I was flabbergasted. People with wounds all over. Corpses. I couldn't believe someone would do such a thing. I wasn't even outraged...just sad. In the end, I really was just an ignorant, pampered vampire.

"Vill...why do you think Madhart wants to take over the world?"

"I don't know. I can't even fully understand you."

I glanced at Nelia's back. She seemed to glow as she stood up to evil. This wasn't the time to whine... I had to do whatever I could. So I followed after her...but then I noticed. Gertrude was holding what seemed to be a bunch of keys behind her back.

She smiled as she said, "Lady Nelia, I found them."

"Uh... What?"

Nelia stared in shock at the keys in her maid's hands.

“Where did you find it?!”

“They were on the floor, right there.”

“Good! Now we can save everyone!”

Gertrude kept on smiling, but her expression only gave me a bad feeling. She was always so expressive...but not this time. Her smile felt fake, with darkness looming behind it.

“You think we need to save them?” Gertrude said.

“What? Of course we do. Give me the keys.”

“But they all opposed Aruka. They are foolish traitors who incurred the president’s wrath.”

“Wha...?”

“These keys are for locking you in.”

They fell from the maid’s hands, loudly crashing onto the ground.

Nelia stared at the floor...and I couldn’t believe my eyes when I saw what followed.

Gertrude stabbed Nelia in the side with a dagger.

Her red blood dripped down to the floor. She looked up at her maid, her eyes as though she was trapped in a nightmare.

“Wh-why...? You...”

“I am Gertrude. Commander of the Eighth Unit, Gertrude Rainsworth.”

Nelia held her stomach in pain as she fell to her knees, then to the ground.

I was still frozen from shock when Gertrude ran up to me, bloody dagger in hand. The maid’s movements were so swift that I didn’t even feel her hostility.

“Lady Komari!”

Suddenly, everything went white. Vill was standing before me, kunais at the ready.

Gertrude’s attack was fiercer. Her dagger was fast like a bee, and she knocked the kunai from Vill’s hands. Gertrude immediately launched a roundhouse kick

to her midsection.

“Guh!” Vill was blown away like a leaf in the wind, leaving a trail of blood on the floor. There was a blade at the tip of Gertrude’s shoe.

I couldn’t do anything.

Nelia was down. Vill was in pain and couldn’t even stand up.

Gertrude...was smiling, like always. Eerily.

“Terakomari Gandesblood. Your blood will be a stepping stone to Gerra-Aruka’s future,” she said monotonously before punching me.

The blow hit my stomach, and I blacked out for a moment, but I managed to stand in place. Then I saw her shoe right before my face, and my brain shook as the floor changed places with the ceiling.

I was blown away with ease and crashed into a jail cell’s bars. It wasn’t until then that I realized I had been kicked in the face.

It hurt. My entire body was in agony. How had this happened?

“I’ve finally caught up to you, Nelia,” a man’s voice said out of the blue.

From the other side of the hallway...from the entrance to the Daydream Paradise appeared a Warblade wearing Gerra-Aruka’s army uniform. One of the Eight Illustrious Generals. Pascal Rainsworth. One of the Republic’s stooges who’d been tormenting Nelia.

He finally caught up to us...but wait, if he’s here, then what happened to Sakuna, Delphyne, and my Seventh Unit?

“Rainsworth?! Explain what is going on!” Nelia was crouched on the ground, holding her belly.

Vill was completely down for the count. I tried standing up but tripped right away. I couldn’t move because of the pain.

The corners of Rainsworth’s mouth curled up eerily as he approached.

“Too bad, Nelia. That’s my sister. She’s been observing you this whole time.”

Nelia gasped. Who knew if he was telling the truth? Either way, Rainsworth’s words were powerful enough to flip her world upside down.

Rainsworth in front and Gertrude behind us.

We were cornered.



The fortress city of Faure was quiet.

The fierce battle had left the city in ruins, but it was now free of enemies. The vampires' magic had turned the Warblades, Sapphires, and beast-folk into minced meat, and they were now in prison, so they wouldn't cause trouble even after the Dark Core healed them.

"It looks like the Haku-Goku Commonwealth wanted to measure Mulnite's potential. We just need to use the prisoners as hostages to have them retreat, and I'm sure they'll accept," the Empress said, exasperated, sitting atop the rubble.

She had been in a meeting with the chancellor a few moments before. The latter was in a panic on the other side of the Crystal, but she basically threatened him: *"Do it, you have five seconds."* *"Stop crying."* *"If you don't, I'll take Komari's custody away from you."*

Flöte handed her a cup of coffee and said, "What do you mean by *potential*?"

"Thanks," the Empress said as she took the cup. "They wanted to see how we'd react in case of emergency, the crafty pricks."

"And you crushed them with your genius strategic prowess, Lady Karen."

"Oh, please. I'll take you out for dinner for doing such a good job. But it's clear that the Haku-Goku Commonwealth was holding back. Remember what that girl we captured said?"

"Commander Prohellya Butchersky? Yes, we have her rolled up in a jail cell. She was exceedingly shameless for a prisoner; she asked for borscht and piroshki."

"Give her a potato and leave it at that. See, she only gave orders and didn't fight herself. It was the same for the other commanders. I'm guessing Haku-Goku's secretary general instructed them to do so. What I mean is, the Sapphires never had any intention of destroying Mulnite. Even if they do harbor

the desire to bring us down, they probably think they'll do that themselves, not with Gerra-Aruka leading the way."

"I see. What about the Lapelico Kingdom?"

"I heard the Republic threatened to stop exporting bananas to them if they refused to lend their army. That kingdom is locked in a heated civil war between herbivores and carnivores. The carnivores didn't bend the knee to Aruka's threat since they don't need bananas, but it was pretty effective on the herbivores. You saw how everyone attacking was a herbivore, didn't you? It wasn't their government's choice—just some herbivores acting of their own volition. I told them Mulnite would sell them bananas, and they calmed down."

"I feel like I'm hearing about an entirely different world."

"That's because it is." the Empress smiled. "Anyway, we've fulfilled our objective. Now we just have to wait for Komari to expose the Daydream Paradise's secret, and that will be it for Madhart."

"Will Ms. Gandesblood really be up to the task? I could send my troops right away."

"There's no need. It's not only Komari—she's with Nelia and Karla. Let's just sit back and wait for the good news. I'll have the guys over at the palace prepare a feast to celebrate."

The Empress stretched her arms then, exposing a bit of her cleavage. Flöte's heart skipped a beat. Now was not the time to let her mind wander! She ruminated over her situation.

Gerra-Aruka's defeat was almost guaranteed. The probabilities of them attacking Faure again were slim, and there were protests going on at their capital calling for the president's appearance. They had no way to counterattack. For sure.

"Your Majesty! Urgent report!" A messenger ran up to them.

The Empress frowned as she stood up.

"What is it? Did Aruka surrender?"

"No. Their army is approaching us."

“So they want to keep going until the bitter end. No way their leftovers could stand up to us, though.”

“No, this troop approaching us consists of five thousand people...”

“What??” Flöte exclaimed.

The messenger’s hands were trembling.

“The number is correct. An army of five thousand is marching from Gerra-Aruka to the grasslands here in the Dark Core Zone. The nearby portal has already been destroyed, so it will take them some time to reach us.”

“You must be kidding! They only have eight units!”

“H-however...they’ve already conquered some of Mulnite’s and the Heavenly Paradise’s territories.”

“What did you say?!”

Then the Correspondence Crystal that directly connected to the Gerra-Aruka Republic’s president glowed. The Empress poured mana into it with a calm demeanor.

The man’s voice echoed.

“Good day, Your Majesty. I think you must have noticed by now.”

“Oh, you’re alive? How resilient.”

“Such a weak Core Implosion couldn’t possibly kill me. You thought Petrose Calamaria was enough to stop me?”

“What do you want? If you want us to return your imprisoned commanders, then apologize. Say you’re sorry for waging war against us.”

“No need to return those prisoners. I’m calling to advise you to surrender.” He chuckled. *“There is no future for the Mulnite Empire or the Heavenly Paradise. Continuing the war will only bring misfortune, so I want you to agree to my demands, for the good of your people. Tell me where your Dark Core is.”*

“Don’t make me repeat myself. I’m not telling you. Our commanders will cut your ambitions short.”

“How sad, Your Majesty. It appears vampires really are as lowly as I thought.

You will not be able to stand up against my army of the strongest Warblades. Time to learn the law of the jungle. The strong will prevail—and you will bend the knee.”

Flöte couldn't take it anymore. She loudly strode to the Empress's side and shouted at the Crystal in her hand.

“So you reveal your true colors, you tyrant! The Mulnite Empire will not succumb to a scumbag like you!”

“Stop it, Flöte. Don't provoke him, or he'll explode.”

“Just what I'd love! Hey, creep, I hear no one in your country likes you! Have anything to say about the protests over at your capital?! What use is there in a ruler loathed by their people?! You wish you could be as great as Her Majesty Karen Helvetius! Go to hell, you rusted piece of shit!”

“Ha! You've got a funny subordinate over there, though I prefer them a bit quieter. I'll give her proper training at my Daydream Paradise after I capture her.”

“Wha—?!”

“You threaten to lay a hand on my lovely subordinates? I won't let you.”

“Hilarious. You don't even know what your 'lovely subjects' are going through as we speak.”

Madhart raised the mana output to send a picture, which was displayed in the air. It showed a city somewhere.

There were the Empress's adorable subjects. The vampires of Mulnite's army in a sea of blood. Among them were Crimson Lords Delphyne and Sakuna Memoir.

The shock nearly made Flöte lose her mind.

The look on the Empress's face turned grimmer.

“I will give them proper punishment if you don't surrender. I've heard of this thing called lingchi, which they used in the Enchanted Lands long ago. You slowly cut off part of someone's body, piece by piece, over a long period of time. You really get to savor their pain. Oh, but don't worry. They won't die. You

know, because of the Dark Core."

"Lady Karen! We must go save them!"

"No point in sending reinforcements now. Our elite troop is already heading your way. There is only one choice left for the Mul-Heaven Alliance: surrender and become our slaves."

"Don't be ridiculous! Your elite? Ha! An empty bluff if I've ever heard one!"

"I'd say it's perfectly natural to increase your military forces in secret if you're preparing for real war."

"Wha...?! Th-then that army of five thousand..."

"Indeed. The Eight Illustrious Generals are not our only commanders." He lowered his voice. "I would say it's more like the Five Thousand Illustrious Generals."

The Empress hung up.

She didn't say anything. Flöte only heard the steps of the soldiers coming and going around them. Impatient, she asked: "Lady Karen, what do we do? Would you like me to engage the enemy?"

"No need for that." Her voice was firm. She placed a hand on Flöte's head and said, "That army of five thousand is nothing but leftovers. But I need to talk with President Madhart. I need to see with my own eyes what kind of person he is."

"Where are you going?"

"I'll be back soon. Faure is in your hands, Flöte."

Then lightning shook the ground.

It came out of the blue. Flöte's eyes were blinded by white light, and the heat waves shook her whole body, making her fall on her behind. There was a high-pitched ringing in her ears. The guys in the Mascarail Unit walking about even started screaming.

The white light disappeared in an instant, the Empress along with it.

"Lady Karen...?"

The only thing left behind was a mountain of black, charred rubble, and the

pulverized Correspondence Crystal.

Flöte was shocked.

The Empress had left to go meet with the enemy leader. The last Flöte saw of her wasn't her usual eccentric, calm, and collected self. There had been flaming rage in her eyes, and that look on her face was forever burned in Flöte's mind.



Perhaps my head was refusing to accept reality.

Gertrude had undoubtedly betrayed us. There was no sign of her being manipulated. She had done it all—gouged Nelia's belly, knocked out Vill, kicked me away—out of her own will.

"Don't try anything, Lady Nelia. I covered the blade in poison. You will be paralyzed soon."

"Gertrude! Why did you do this?!"

The maid didn't answer. Instead, Rainsworth sneered.

"Don't be stupid, Nelia. She was a spy. She's been observing you for five whole years... How couldn't you notice even once?"

"You lie! She's on my side! Right, Gertrude?!"

"Yes... I am on your side, Lady Nelia."

"You are not, Gertrude." Rainsworth placed a hand on her shoulder, and the maid slightly winced, but she forced a smile.

"I'm sorry. Right now...I am your enemy."

Nelia gasped in between convulsions.

"I am Pascal Rainsworth's sister. I was your maid on my older brother's orders. And now...the day to make you give up has finally come."

"Make me give up...?"

"I watched you from up close. I know how much people talked behind your back, how hard you worked without being rewarded, how much you suffered through every day...and you will break down if you keep on living like this. You... should give up on your impossible ambitions and live in peace instead."

“...!” Nelia, with a ghastly look, tried to jump at Gertrude, but her knees gave out. The poison was kicking in.

Rainsworth whistled.

“Oh my, how scary. You almost had me there after seeing Abercrombie’s unit down, but Gertrude sure did a good job. Now I won’t have to finish you off myself.”

“I—I won’t lose to you! I still have an ace up my sleeve!”

“You don’t. Sadly, I know you don’t.” Rainsworth walked up to her and brushed aside her peach-colored hair as his reptile-like eyes stared right into hers. “You mean the Mulnite Empire and the Heavenly Paradise, don’t you? You hoped they would beat Gerra-Aruka’s army. But that won’t happen. The Warblades will wipe out those vampires and Peace Spirits. I can guarantee you that.”

“W-wait...what do you mean?! Did they... Did they lose?!” I screamed.

Rainsworth scoffed.

“They will. Our hidden army of five thousand is heading for Faure as we speak. The Mul-Heaven Alliance has been worn down by the consecutive battles—there is no way they can fight back.”

“This is the first I’ve heard of that army. Aruka only has eight units!”

“We were hiding it, even from you. Those five thousand Warblades were trained right here in the Daydream Paradise. They were once criminals and traitors, but now they’ve become our obedient servants.”

I didn’t get it. There was no way they could really have an army of five thousand. But it didn’t sound like a bluff. Rainsworth sounded extremely confident. As if he was absolutely sure they would win. So...was the Mulnite Empire really driven into a corner like he said?

“Those are the facts, Nelia. You can’t do anything, so stop thinking of a way out and accept the prosperity President Madhart will bring us. He will build a utopia for Warblades, by Warblades. And I will advise him to let you in.”

“Th-that’s not happening. I will defeat Madhart...”

“The president only wants world peace. His ideal is no different from yours.”

“Wrong! I would do it another way! M-Mrs. Gandesblood told me, that if people worked to lift each other up, then the world would be at peace...”

“No need to think so hard about it. Just let yourself be set free from the pain... Leave your intangible dream behind and be mine.”

Rainsworth placed his fingers on her chin.

Nelia’s eyes were devoid of hope. She was silent. The situation couldn’t be worse. If Madhart’s five-thousand-man army was really heading for Faure, then the defense team couldn’t do anything. Nelia and I were doomed.

But still...I couldn’t give up.

I didn’t know much about Nelia Cunningham’s or the Gerra-Aruka Republic’s circumstances, but I did know that what these guys were doing was wrong.

I didn’t want to lose to the sort of person who would gladly harm someone else for their own gain. I couldn’t let myself be defeated by morons who would laugh at someone else’s efforts.

“...Mulnite won’t lose.”

“Hah?”

Rainsworth glared at me, but I couldn’t let myself be intimidated.

“Mulnite won’t lose! Nelia’s dream isn’t over yet, either! I won’t let you imbeciles ruin it for her!”

“You cocky little bitch... Who’re you calling an imbecile?!”

“You, who else?! Mom said that scum who saw other people as nothing but tools had no future ahead of them. And I’ve seen people like that actually get wrecked for it!”

“So what?! We Warblades will make slaves out of everyone! That’s how the world should be! You have no right to say anything, lowly vampire!”

“Shut your bigoted mouth! That’s why Nelia hates you so much!”

“Wha—?! Wh-who cares if she does?! I will make her mine either way! Same goes for Mulnite and the Heavenly Paradise!”

“Nelvia is strong. She won’t submit to you... Besides, you’re a primitive prick for even thinking to make her ‘yours’ using force! Not even chimpanzees are that stupid!”

“What...did you say...?”

“Apologize to her already and piss off, you deluded jerk!”

“INSOLENT BITCH!!”

Then I got the wind knocked out of me. He punched me right in the stomach, and it didn’t end there. Rainsworth let his rage take over as he punched me again and again. Dull pain radiated all over my body. It didn’t take long before I was unable to feel anymore.

“I...won’t lose...”

“Shut your trap, dirty vampire!”

He kicked me in the face. I felt my brain rattle inside my head, and then everything went black.

My head was screaming. Blood dripped out my mouth and nose onto the floor. The pain came after. Tears flowed out from my eyes. It hurt. So, so much.

Still, I didn’t give in. I couldn’t let this despicable piece of garbage defeat me.

“Rainsworth! Leave her alone!” Nelvia shouted, still crouched down on the floor.

The Warblade stopped and shot her a glare.

“Nelvia...what are you saying? She’s a vampire. A fool who dared oppose Gerra-Aruka. Killing her wouldn’t be enough... I’ll make a guinea pig out of her right here, for the rest of her life.”

“I won’t let you! She’s...she’s dear to me!”

“*Dear?* Don’t make me laugh. Vampires are nothing more than our slaves.”

“You wouldn’t get it!!”

Nelvia hurled a dagger at him.

It didn’t fly on a straight course due to the numbness in her arm, but it did

manage to graze Rainsworth's cheek.

"What?"

Blood dripped down his face. He'd been caught totally off guard. It was clear on his reptilian face that he was taken aback, still unable to process it. When he finally did, he screamed: "Y-you've got to be KIDDING ME!!"

He kicked Nelia's stomach and slammed her against the wall like she was a bouncing ball. He kept going. He walked up to her, lifted her up by the hair, and yelled in her face.

"You defy me, too?! You are mine! You should just do as I say! Why do you oppose me?! Are you that eager to die?!"

"I...will change Aruka! Maybe I can't do it alone, but I can do anything with Komari by my side! Together we can fight Madhart!"

"Shut it already! It's not happening!"

Rainsworth kicked her again. I couldn't keep quiet.

"Stop it! Don't you hurt her anymore!"

"Silence, vampire!"

Then a spinning dagger came flying at me and grazed my shoulder, cutting my skin under the uniform like butter. Pain spread, and blood spurted out. I couldn't stand. Meanwhile, Rainsworth dropped Nelia and drew his sword.

"It's all your fault. You gave Nelia hope she didn't need... She should've been broken already. If it weren't for you... I'll kill you here and now."

There was nothing I could do. Vill didn't seem to be waking any time soon. Nelia was also paralyzed due to the poison...but even if she wasn't, the despair she felt was clearly petrifying her.

It was all so vexing. I was going to die here... I clenched my teeth, then...

"What are you doing?"

...I heard a cold voice.

Everyone turned to look at the source.

A girl was standing there, her silver hair now a dark red, dyed in dry blood. Her clothes looked tattered from sword wounds, but her skin beneath them was mostly healed.

It was the vampire with Sapphire heritage—Sakuna Memoir.

She was glaring at Rainsworth, cold rage in her eyes. Standing like a phantom.

“Ms. Komari...you’re hurt. Who did it? Was it Mr. Warblade over there? Harming us wasn’t enough for him?”

The puddle of blood at her feet froze over. She was so furious that mana was overflowing from her body.

“Sakuna?! What are you doing here?!”

“I followed you. Thank goodness I got here in time.”

“B-but you’re injured!”

“Oh, this is nothing. Nothing compared with your wounds.”

Sakuna held her severed right hand with her left, then stuck it on her wrist. The combined power of her icy mana and the Dark Core’s powers rapidly connected it back to her arm. I wanted to scream at the sight, but actually, someone else seemed more shaken about it than me.

“You...you were alive?!” Rainsworth yelled.

“I won’t let anyone hurt Ms. Komari.”

“There is nothing wrong with doing as I please to a member of an inferior race!”

“An inferior race...?” Any hint of warmth vanished Sakuna’s eyes; the white, icy fog exuding from her body crawled across the floor. “Oh, I do not like that sort of mentality. There are no inferior races in this world. Vampires, Sapphires, Warblades—we are all equal. Anyone who says otherwise will sooner or later meet their doom. If you really think of other people just as tools...then it’s time I froze your dirty mouth shut.”

Sakuna took a step forward and held her staff high to hit him—an unusual fighting style for a mage. However, her attack didn’t reach Rainsworth, for

Gertrude stopped it halfway.

“I won’t let you hurt my brother.”

“Step aside! I will personally take down that Warblade!”

Sparks shining bright like stars went off as Sakuna’s and Gertrude’s attacks clashed. The echoes of the high-pitched clangs filled the prison, as did the bloodlust overflowing from them. I was glad Sakuna was here to help...but she was so intense that I was at a loss for words. It was clear she was utterly incensed.

Gertrude suddenly looked up.

“Brother! It’s not just this pseudo-Sapphire! There are more enemies coming!”

Then the ground above us trembled.

Everyone but Sakuna opened their eyes wide.

The tremors kept coming, shaking the inside of the Daydream Paradise to headache-inducing levels. It wasn’t an earthquake. It felt more as if they were setting off bombs on the surface.

“Sakuna Memoir! What have you done?!”

Sakuna stepped away from Gertrude.

Her icy stare pierced Rainsworth’s.

“I simply followed Ms. Komari...and others came after me. Mainly Ms. Karla Amatsu and those journalist ladies.”

There was tension in the air.

“You’re kidding,” said Nelia.

I thought Karla died when she fell out the window... She’s alive?

I didn’t have time to speculate. A magic circle formed on Sakuna’s back as frigid air formed all around her. That was the spell she frequently used in war—*Dust Tail Comet*. Gertrude stood before her brother, holding her sword tight.

“Brother, let me take care of the pseudo-Sapphire and Karla Amatsu.”

“What?! That other girl is one thing, but Karla Amatsu is too dangerous! She’ll kill you if you go after her!”

“I, too, am an Illustrious General. I will not be defeated. Besides...I just got a call from the president. He has a mission for you.”

“Die,” Sakuna said as she cast the freezing spell.

White stars cut through the air as they flew at Gertrude. The Warblade maid expertly parried the projectiles with her sword but missed one of them, and it flew past her and crashed into the wall right next to me, opening a hole. I prepared myself for death at any moment.

Rainsworth also parried the incoming stars as he yelled:

“I guess I’ll be leading the Daydream Unit! That can wait until we’ve taken care of the intruders.”

“It cannot! He said they’re going berserk and might start destroying Gerra-Aruka territory.”

“Bunch of useless twits... They can’t do anything without me.”

“Remember that their minds have been broken. They need a commander to properly direct them. Also...it appears a vampire unit is heading their way.”

“Remnants of the Mulnite Imperial Army? Stubborn mongrels.”

I raised my head. Whose unit could that be? It wasn’t Sakuna’s or Delphyne’s. Couldn’t be Flöte’s or Helldesus’s—they were in Faure. Maybe it was—what was her name?—Pet-something’s, the First Unit.

Rainsworth grimaced. He approached Nelia with heavy steps.

“Nelia! Stay right there until I return. You’ll come back to your senses once I’ve slaughtered the vampires. You’ll see how great a nation Gerra-Aruka is.”

“I...won’t...”

“You’re trembling. I knew you weren’t fit for being a general.”

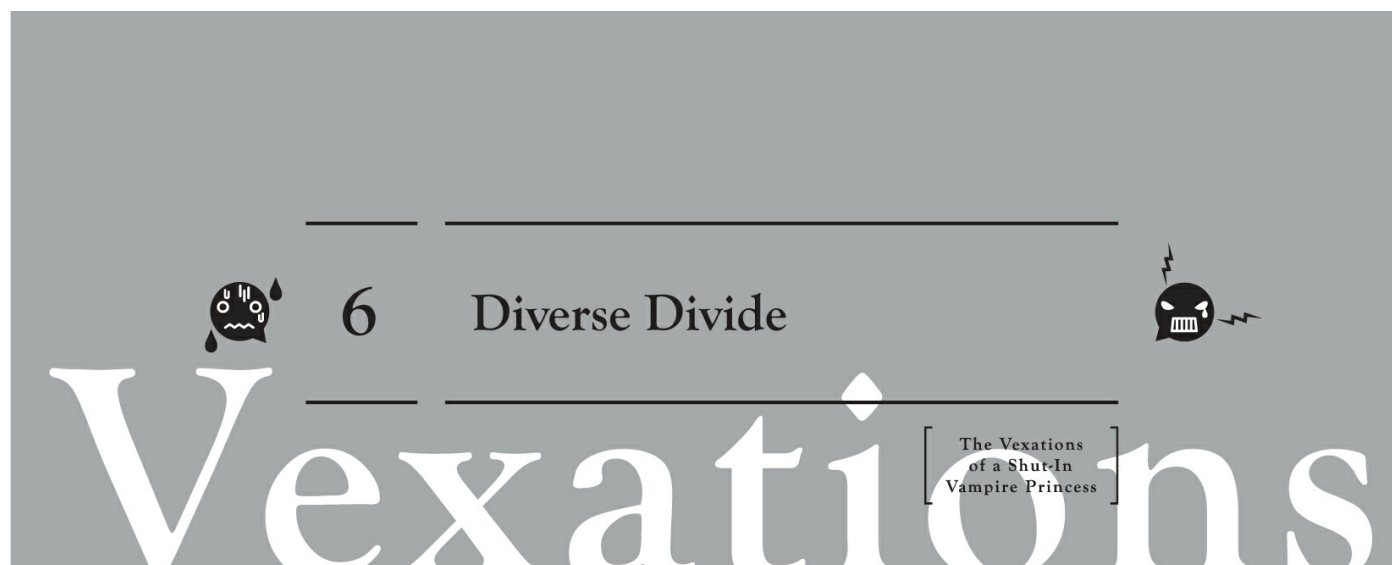
“...No! This is because of the poison...”

“Your days are over, pseudo Sapphire! Advanced-level blade spell: *Razor Splash!*” shouted Gertrude.

Her spell caused a huge explosion. The cold and hot air mixed at a tremendous speed, and everything turned white. Sakuna dodged it by moving into a narrow space, and Gertrude followed behind her like a ninja.

By the time I realized, Rainsworth was gone, too.

I could still hear the sound of magic being activated and explosions. But Vill and I couldn't move. The situation was too complicated; I didn't even know where to start. I couldn't even stand up from the pain to begin with.



The palace was not too far away from the president’s executive office.

The royal family lived there back when the Gerra-Aruka Republic was still the Aruka Kingdom. The building had been partially burned down during the coup five years ago, but reconstruction was underway, so as to keep it as a reminder of a dark era in the country’s history.

One of its towers was taller than the others. It was the Courteheuse Clock Tower, where past Aruka kings had held banquets, enjoying their liquor as they took in the prosperity of the royal capital

A man stood on its lookout, wearing a regular suit—nothing particularly special. President Gerra Madhart.

“A boat both floats and sinks in water. It’s a wise saying, but that doesn’t apply to my country. So long as we control everything with force, there will be no issues.”

The sight beneath him was nothing but outlandish. The citizens had turned violent, setting everything on fire. They clashed with the garrison and the army time and again, making mounds of dead bodies here and there. They all were standing up against the president’s tyranny. They shouted about stopping the inhumane war, liberating the unjustly imprisoned, setting free everyone underground in the Daydream Paradise, holding an election for a new president... They were past salvation.

But shut them down with strength, and they would not speak up again. Madhart had spent the last five years creating his secret army, and Rainsworth would lead it to conquer the Mulnite Empire. Then they would have nothing

else to say. No one would dare criticize his administration.

“The Warblades will rule the world. I will not let anyone get in the way.”

“You’re quite confident, Madhart.”

Before her knew it, a woman had appeared behind him.

The blond vampire wore a luxurious dress and a look of silent anger on her face. She slowly approached him.

“I’m surprised you found me. Why are you here?”

“Does it matter?”

The Mulnite Empress’s eyes were glowing red. She lived up to her title as the Thunderbolt Empress—excelling among the lowly vampires.

“Ha... Please sit down. Let us watch together as the Mulnite Empire falls. I have a Farsight Crystal right here.”

“I could kill you this instant.”

“Just try it. I’m not the same as before.”

“...? Oh, right. I remember now.” The Empress chuckled. “I beat you to a pulp back when I was a Crimson Lord. Oh man, to think the boy from back then is president now. And a tyrant loathed by his whole nation, at that.”

“*Boy?* That’s an unfunny joke. I’m older than you.”

“And yet you’re still one even now. You haven’t grown up mentally since then, not in the slightest.”

Madhart ignored her and activated the farsight spell.

The crystal showed an army of five thousand. Not soldiers for a sports-war—a group of powerful murderers, created only for that purpose.

Making them was simple. You just isolated young people with potential at the Daydream Paradise and brainwashed them. “*We’ll kill your family if you don’t fight.*” “*Do as we say, and we’ll give you huge rewards.*” “*It’s either kill the enemy or be killed yourself.*” There were plenty of methods for molding them into soldiers, though some of the youngsters had ended up utterly broken and useless.

That was the Daydream Unit—the strongest of armies, built atop countless sacrifices.

“So what did you come all the way here for, Your Majesty? Are you surrendering? Oh right, the other nations gave me a call; they were terrified.”

The Heavenly Paradise’s Goddess said, *“Stop your army right now. This war is pointless.”*

The Haku-Goku Commonwealth’s secretary general said, *“This wasn’t our deal. You never mentioned anything about a secret unit.”*

The Enchanted Lands’ Tianzi said, *“Aruka has gone down the wrong path. Stop the war immediately.”*

The Lapelico Kingdom’s king said, *“Just give us the bananas, then we’ll talk.”*

They all feared Gerra-Aruka’s military might, but it didn’t matter if the whole world turned on them. Defeating the other nations was easy with an army of five thousand on their side.

“Foolish. You’re gravely misunderstanding the situation,” the Empress said.

“What...?”

“You formed your army using threats and violence; it may as well just be a mob. But I suppose there’s no use in telling you. I simply came here to see your last moments.”

Madhart chuckled. It was obvious it was *her* who was at a disadvantage here.

“I am merciful, so let’s give you one last chance. Withdraw your troops right now if you want to stay alive. Or rather, if you don’t want to meet a fate worse than death,” he said.

“What nonsense. All I hear is a sore loser talking.”

Just then, a tremendous amount of mana flowed through the air above the capital.

A screen appeared in the sky. It was a magical instrument set up by Six Nations News, supposedly to communicate important news to anywhere in the world. They had these screens everywhere. It would play images recorded by

the so-called electrovideo box, if Madhart was remembering correctly.

“Hello, world! This is Melka Tiano, from Six Nations News! It’s my first time trying this, so I hope it’s coming out nicely! Anyway, we’ve got important news for you! Look! Six Nations News has just infiltrated the Gerra-Aruka Republic’s Daydream Paradise!”

Her high-pitched voice echoed throughout the whole capital. There was a silver-haired Sapphire on the screen, holding a microphone in one hand and hurriedly talking to the camera.

“A picture is worth a thousand words, so let’s go! Look at the number of prison cells in here! These are all the people who opposed Madhart’s administration!”

“Um, Ms. Melka, this camera is too heavy. Could we change places?”

“Shut up, you dumbass! Ahem, excuse me! As you can see, among these probably innocent prisoners here are peoples other than Warblades! And look at those injuries! It appears the rumors about Gerra-Aruka carrying out human experimentation were true!”

Sweat was forming on Madhart’s forehead. The unit guarding the Daydream Paradise had been annihilated. He should have considered the possibility of paparazzi entering the underground...but it still wasn’t that big a problem. His secrets being exposed made no difference in war. Gerra-Aruka simply had to crush the enemy with overwhelming power...

“Now then, we came here to expose Madhart’s evils, and there is currently an Aruka army of five thousand heading for Faure. What they’re doing is inhumane! They couldn’t be crueller pieces of garbage! I am sure you all must be outraged by their misdeeds! It’s time to stand up against them, people of the world! I certainly will! And here is our representative, who will guide us through this battle! Everyone, welcome Imperial Saber Karla Amatsu!”

“Bwuh?! O-okay. Ahem. Gerra-Aruka can’t get away with this. They were also responsible for the Peace Spirit disappearances occurring along our nations’ border. And as the reporter already said, we were not their only victims. All sorts of peoples were captured and tortured here. This is very, very bad.”

“Lady Karla, please speak up.”

“Okay... Prepare yourselves, leaders of Gerra-Aruka! Your silly little army of five thousand is nothing more than a bunch of ants in my eyes! Everyone else around the world, rest assured. The strongest Imperial Saber will completely annihilate that insolent army!”

“That’s what I’m talking about! Any other words, Commander Amatsu?”

“Huh? No, nothing more... Ah! Yeah, my brother! Kakumei Amatsu, are you watching this?! Your cute little sister is doing very well! You’ll see, I’ll become the world’s best pâtissier...I mean, the world’s strongest commander! Come back home once in a while, okay?!”

Madhart was shocked, as if struck by lightning.

Kakumei Amatsu. He was one of Inverse Moon’s top brass. He was cooperating with Gerra-Aruka. So why? Was Karla Amatsu connected to them? Had Kakumei betrayed him? Was it true what Karla said about the five-thousand-man army being naught but ants to her? No, that couldn’t be possible, but if this was Inverse Moon we’re talking about...

“Oh-em-gee! Look at that, Commander Amatsu! Commander Memoir is already fighting with a maid! Could that be a Warblade soldier?!”

“...Wait. Huh? Ms. Gertrude? Why...?”

“That’s our enemy. I will kill her.”

“Wait, Koharu!”

The screen showed a ninja girl joining the fight against Illustrious General Gertrude Rainsworth. That maid was Gerra-Aruka’s eighth general, who had been kept secret to the world until now. She couldn’t possibly lose to a simple commander...but Karla Amatsu was no simple commander.



“What’s wrong, Madhart? You’re turning pale.”

“So your ultimate weapon...is that Peace Spirit girl.”

“No, I didn’t expect that, actually.” The Empress grinned. “Our ultimate weapon has always been our crimson vampire princess. I know you must’ve had an inkling. Terakomari Gandesblood will lead the people.”

The Empress smiled like a champion, certain of her victory.



It was so frustrating, she could die.

She had lived these five years with only the purpose of reforming Gerra-Aruka. At first, it was to rescue her family and take back her father. Then she trained like hell to become the next president. But it was all in vain. There was no stopping Madhart’s iron fist.

An army of five thousand? How?! How had he managed to keep that to himself right up until the very end?! Now the Mulnite Empire would really end up as a slave to Madhart. They would all suffer like the people in the Daydream Paradise.

Nelia couldn’t stop her tears from flowing.

She was paralyzed, powerless, and pathetic. Where had it all gone wrong? Had her efforts not been enough?

Rainsworth only laughed at her. Gertrude had betrayed her. She’d been duped. Was there really not a single person out there who understood her ideals?

Maybe I should just give up. Why make things harder for myself?

“Nelia...please help me get up.”

She raised her head. Komari was squirming before her, a terrible look of pain on her face.

“What...for?”

“I gotta go after Rainsworth. Everyone will be in danger if I don’t.”

Nelia’s jaw dropped. Komari was in a terrible state—her clothes were

completely tattered after getting beat to a pulp, and there was blood flowing from her shoulder all the way down to the floor. Yet her eyes didn't show any sign of giving up. They were shining bright.

"I can't. I'm paralyzed from the poison."

"Right... But Sakuna and Karla are here. We can't give up yet."

"There's no point. Karla Amatsu is unreliable..."

"You don't know her. She can turn her enemies into noodles."

"I think you're the one who doesn't know her..." Nelia put on a bitter smile. "Why? How do you keep on fighting, when all hope is lost?"

"I don't want to fight. But I have to. Everything hurts like crazy, but I'm a Crimson Lord... I can't give up without doing anything."

"It's useless. You're going up against an army of five thousand..."

"Rainsworth could be lying! We gotta go there first and find out!"

"He's not! They really have five thousand. There's no reason for Rainsworth to lie."

"Even then, it doesn't matter. I've killed over five hundred million after all."

"Now that's a lie!"

"Yes, it's all a lie! But I gotta go, or then everything will really be hopeless!"

"What can you do?! Even with your Core Implosion, there's no way you can win!"

"Core Implosion?! What in the world are you talking about?"

Nelia's jaw was on the floor. She'd already suspected it, but it appeared Komari really didn't know about her own powers. She was trying to face her opponents out of pure determination. *Komari's beyond comprehension*, Nelia thought.

The vampire girl lifted herself up, short of breath.

"You don't know until you try."

"Maybe, but...! I can't do it. They've all made fun of me...and I've achieved

nothing... Now I know my ideals are unattainable..."

"Don't say that!" Komari shouted; Nelia straightened her back by reflex. "At first...I thought you were dumb. That you were insane for asking me to help you with taking over the world. But I changed my mind once I met you again. Maybe it's partly because you were my mom's protégée, but I thought you had some really cool ideas."

"But it's nothing but talk...all that about people living to lift each other up."

"Still, I like it. I love that idea."

Nelia's brain short-circuited for a second.

"E-even if you love it, what's the point of an idea that can't become reality?"

"You're the one who decides if your ideals are impossible!"

She felt like telling her off—as if Komari had any authority to say that. But Nelia couldn't. Komari's energy was overwhelming her.

The Crimson Lord stared Nelia straight in the eye and said:

"I like your pure heart!"

"...! But what can I even do...?"

"Suck my blood."

"Huh? ...What?"

"Vampires suck each other's blood as proof of their trust in each other. You're upset about no one recognizing your efforts, but I do. I believe in you. This is my first time doing this sort of thing...but you're my comrade! We can take over the world together, you and I! So suck my blood!"

Nelia's heart skipped a beat.

It was that same act that Komari herself had turned down six years ago. She had finally accepted Nelia.

Was she out of her mind? How could she tell someone who was not a vampire to suck her blood?

Nelia shook her head, shaking off any hesitation.

Setting aside the whole bloodsucking thing, Komari didn't seem to be thinking straight.

Take over the world together? Was she hearing herself? What could two brats achieve? The one taking over the world right now was a powerful nation, an army of five thousand. They'd just get stomped like a pair of bugs.

And yet... And yet a fire had been lit in Nelia's heart.

Madhart had taken her family. Rainsworth had harassed her for so long. Gertrude had betrayed her. It felt as if the whole world was intent on preventing her from achieving her dreams. But it wasn't. There was someone out there who understood her.

"O-okay...sorry about that. I was being too arrogant, yeah. I'm sure you found it gross," Komari said, glancing down, as if finally coming back to her senses.

"...No." Nelia closed her eyes and shook her head.

Then she crawled her way over to Komari.

"Nelia...?"

"I accept your trust."

She placed her right hand on Komari's cheek; it was so injured, it pained her just to see it. It wasn't just her cheek, either. She felt bad touching her cut shoulder, so she drew her face close to Komari's and licked a stream of blood dripping from the corner of her mouth.

It tasted like blood. Obviously.

She immediately felt like throwing up. The blood of other groups was venom to Warblades. Usually one would absolutely refuse taking any vampire blood.

Yet strangely enough, Nelia felt something was filling her heart. She felt like she finally understood Komari, and Komari understood her.

Nelia looked closely into Komari's eyes.

The vampire's face was red to the point of emitting heat.

"N-Nelia, how is it?"

"Good. Thank you for the meal."

“N-no problem...”

Nelia cracked a smile.

She really was the same as back then.

Once again, she'd changed Nelia's heart for the better.

Komari was right. Now was no time to be giving up. They hadn't run out of possibilities yet.

They could ask for reinforcements from the other nations. Or try to assassinate Madhart. They could obtain an Effulgent Magic Stone to annihilate the five thousand soldiers in one fell swoop.

Yes. I decided I would change Aruka. Think back to all the people unjustly imprisoned. To all the people in pain because of Madhart. And to those who lost their lives to their nonsense.

I am a sword, forged to kill my enemy. This is no time to be afraid.

Then something changed within Nelia's body. Her eyes were hot, burning. She fell to her knees, hand on her face, unable to take the pain. Komari called her name anxiously, but she couldn't respond. Scorching heat welled up from her core.

Core Implosion—Diverse Divide.

Those words came to mind. That was the key to opening a new door.

She remembered Mrs. Gandesblood saying something like that. Change in the world began within a person's heart, and the embodiment of that power was what they called Core Implosion.

Nelia slowly stood up.

She let her power activate, and twin swords appeared by her feet. Her treasures she'd received from her mentor. Nelia picked up the right one and swung it lightly. She didn't feel paralyzed anymore. She had cut off the pain of the poison.

Then she understood: *Diverse Divide* was a power that cut through anything.

Swordsmanship meant for altruism—to divide what was one equally. To share

it.

It was the manifestation of the ideals of harmony her mentor had instilled in her.

With this power in her possession, maybe she could change the world.

“Nelia...is that...?”

“Thank you, Komari. I think I know what to do now.”

Nelia grabbed Komari’s hand.

The endless courage emitting from her body burned Nelia’s. Komari was wincing in pain, and yet she still stood up.

“Where are we going? Are we really...?”

Nelia grabbed her twin swords.

“First, we complete our main objective. We can kill the enemy later.”



Karla Amatsu couldn’t contain her wrath.

The bunch from the Gerra-Aruka Republic were true scoundrels, wanting nothing but to disturb the peace in the world. The people they’d imprisoned were worn out physically and mentally. According to them, they had been used as guinea pigs for magical investigations, analyzing and measuring the Dark Core’s healing power, and even being used as objects for the soldiers to vent and take their anger out on.

Karla’s main philosophy was to let sleeping dogs lie. Not rocking the boat was the best survival strategy from her point of view. However, she couldn’t look past this. She had a strong sense of justice and could not ignore it.

“So here we are in the Daydream Paradise! How deep do Madhart’s crimes go?! We can’t know for sure yet—look! A powerful maid stands in our way! Commander Sakuna Memoir is fighting the Gerra-Aruka maid alongside Ms. Koharu of Kidoshu, from Heavenly Paradise! Look at the ceiling! And the walls! The stray shots are destroying everything!”

“Ms. Melka...let’s go home already. We’re gonna get killed.”

“Good! We’ll die with honor!”

“Please remember we’re journalists, not warriors!”

The reporters were doing a bizarre comedy routine beside Karla. She’d come across them on her way to Daydream Paradise, and they immediately pried and interviewed her, when they realized they were heading the same way.

She’d let them come along without any reason in particular, and it seemed that was the right choice. That electrovideo box was a rare Divine Instrument that could broadcast to the whole world, immediately exposing Gerra-Aruka’s evils. However, back to the matter at hand...

“Koharuuu! You can do it!!”

The girls were fighting a fierce battle before her eyes. Gertrude versus Sakuna Memoir and Koharu.

Sakuna had survived back in Carnalt and somehow knew Komari’s location, so Karla healed her and brought her along...then the moment they arrived at the Daydream Paradise, she went off ahead by herself. After that, she came back while fighting Gertrude. What in the world happened? Did she find Terakomari or Nelia Cunningham? Had the maid been Madhart’s underling all along?

“Die, Warblade.”

Koharu shot a barrage of kunai at Gertrude, and Sakuna followed with a hail of icicles. The maid dodged them all with acrobatic movements, then countered with her blade magic. Sharp slashes flew at the ninja girl, but Sakuna repelled almost all of them with a barrier. The remaining shots, she avoided with a smoke screen and replacement magic.

“Please die, enemies of Aruka.”

Gertrude swung her sword from above, but Koharu shot forward like a squid to dodge it. She immediately moved behind the maid’s back and stabbed at her with her short sword from a sharp angle. Gertrude blocked it with the hilt of her blade, but then Sakuna wielded her staff from above. Gertrude dodged by a hair and countered. It all happened so fast that Karla couldn’t see everything. She couldn’t comprehend what was going on, but she had to pretend like she did.

“Amazing! Commander Amatsu, what are your thoughts on this exchange?!”

“Impressive. Very nice.”

“The maid moves at lightning speed! Is she using some sort of magic?”

“Yes, looks like magic. Though I leave it up to your imagination as to what kind it is.”

“Oh no, Commander Sakuna seems to be losing ground! Will she be all right?!”

“Perhaps. Perhaps not. Maybe she should consider changing strategy. Or maybe she can win.”

“Ms. Melka...is she even taking you seriously?”

Karla wasn't. But she was observing the surroundings as seriously as she could.

There were 2,058 people imprisoned on just the first floor. They were 80 percent Warblades, 10 percent Peace Spirits, and the other 10 percent was a mix of different races. One hundred fifty of the one hundred ninety Peace Spirits who'd gone missing along the border were there, alive. Maybe the others were on lower floors.

Karla took out her Correspondence Crystal and poured in some mana. The person on the other end of the line picked up immediately.

“Goddess, I've confirmed Gerra-Aruka is guilty.”

“Yes, I saw through your eyes. Now we can fight without remorse.”

“First, we must save the captives. Fortunately, there don't seem to be enemies inside the Daydream Paradise besides Ms. Gertrude. I will go look for the keys.”

“Good luck... No, wait. That might not be necessary.”

“What do you mean?”

Then a peach-colored wind blew.

Mana was overflowing from the depths of the prison, and that wasn't all. People, an enormous amount of people who had been captured were running

toward them, crying tears of joy.

Koharu, Sakuna, and Gertrude—all three turned to look at the crowd.

They were escaping. Someone had broken the cells.

“It’s Lady Nelia!” “She’s finally taking action!” “Gerra-Aruka will fall!” They all praised the Moonpeach Princess.

Karla understood it then. The pink-haired girl had done it. She was no regular Warblade. She was a truly great woman, capable of carrying the country on her back.

“The prisoners are already free. Luck is now on our side.”

“Luck is good and all, but things must be fair. It appears Ms. Nelia has freed every one of them, but I doubt the whole crowd is innocent.”

“We can figure that out later. I’m counting on you, Karla.”

“Yes. I’ve memorized their faces, so they won’t escape. We can always catch them again with Kidoshu’s help.”

Not a very flashy job, but that sort of simple work was a better fit for her.

Please don’t let them drag me into battle... Karla Amatsu prayed from the bottom of her heart.



Nelia cut through the jail cells with her twin swords.

She didn’t need any key. Her Core Implosion, *Diverse Divide*, could slice through anything, no matter how hard. A simple swing of her blades was enough.

The prisoners all looked startled at first, but once she yelled, “I’m here to help!” hope came back to their eyes.

“Long live Lady Nelia!”

“Down with Madhart!”

The sentiment was spreading throughout the Daydream Paradise.

“Nelia! There are more cells over here!”

“Got it!”

Komari led her to more prisoners to free.

Everyone ran for it. There was no one there to stop them. Rainsworth had taken all the guards with him to the Dark Core Zone.

“Go! Stand up! We must change Aruka!”

Nelia ran through Daydream Paradise, destroying the cells. The cheers of the people echoed throughout. Except even if they all escaped, an army of five thousand was still waiting. The situation hadn’t changed one bit—but Nelia’s mindset had.

Komari had granted her courage, and now the people looked up to Nelia with hope.

The desire to change Aruka was burning inside her. To do that, she would need to take care of her enemies.

Even if it included the girl who had been by her side for five years, through joy and grief. If that once-kind girl she sympathized with was now standing in her way—then Nelia would have to cut her down without mercy.

She arrived at the first floor, and there was, fighting Karla’s ninja and the silver-haired vampire.

“Gertrude!!”

The maid turned around in shock.

“Lady Nelia! Why...?!”

“I’m here to chew you out...you disloyal servant!”

Nelia swung her swords with full force.

Gertrude held her blade—one Nelia never knew she had—high to defend herself.

A deafening *clang* rang out.

But there was no resistance. Metal was like paper before her Core Implosion power. Gertrude’s sword broke in half.

“Lady Nelia!”

“I am your mistress! It’s time for your punishment, naughty maid!”

“No! I...I did it all for you, Lady Nelia!”

Gertrude threw away her broken sword. Her face was scrunched up in a mix of rage and confusion, but she was still an Illustrious General, and she took out a knife from her pocket with a smooth motion to counterattack.

“Too late!”

Nelia’s lightning blow flung the knife away with ease.

Gertrude jumped back in a hurry, but Nelia would not let her go.

Nelia dropped her swords, then grabbed her arm with her left hand.

Gertrude scowled in lament.

You shouldn’t have rebelled if you were going to regret it!

Nelia clenched her fist, gathering all the rage she felt toward the maid.

“Know your place, SERVANT!!”

She unleashed the full might of her fist, slamming it into the side of the maid’s face.



Gertrude’s body flew like a ball.

She was on the ground, motionless. Had Nelia killed her? Thankfully, her worries were dispelled right away as the girl cried out.

Nelia slowly walked up to her.

The young maid’s face was a disaster. Not because Nelia had hit her—there was deep sadness, helplessness, resignation...all sorts of despairing emotions in her eyes.

“Lady Nelia...I... I just wanted you to be happy.”

“Don’t push your idea of happiness onto me... What did you want me to do?”

Nelia crouched and looked closely at her face. Tears were flowing from

Gertrude's eyes.

"You can't defeat Madhart. He's a true hero, in a bad way... I just didn't want you to get hurt anymore."

"Aren't you Rainsworth's sister? Do you really even care about me?"

"I do!" Gertrude shook her head. "My brother...tortured me. He made me train nonstop...because he said there was no value in living without being strong. But you—you cared for me. You worried whenever I got hurt, you called me your dearest servant, you celebrated my birthdays..."

"But it doesn't make sense. Weren't you trying to make me fall for Rainsworth?"

"My brother is a piece of shit. A piece of rusted shit. But I think he was a bit better in the past. Besides...while he abuses enemies, pawns, and other races, at least he cares for what he considers *his*."

"That's messed up. He's a lunatic."

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry...but, Lady Nelia, I still think you should give up all the pain and live in peace. If you kept going like you were...you'd eventually break."

"I won't break. I have Komari."

Gertrude gasped, then smiled in tears, realizing something.

"Of course, Lady Nelia... Please just forget about me."

"That was simply your rebellious phase. All you did was bite the hand that fed you once; it's no big deal."

"Huh...?"

"But do tell me if there's something about me you don't like. Can't have this relationship be one-sided."

Nelia turned around. Gertrude kept on weeping in silence. There was much she didn't understand about her yet, but there was still time to learn. Chances to talk and understand each other on a deeper level.

"Ms. Cunningham, can we chat for a bit?" A bell chimed.

Lots of people had gathered around her before she knew it. Karla Amatsu and

her ninja, the catgirl with the camera and the Sapphire girl with the mic, and Komari, whose face was scrunched up in pain as she carried her blue-haired maid on her back. Sakuna Memoir ran up to the vampire and asked through tears if she was okay, and all the freed prisoners were around them.

“What? I was going to go after Rainsworth now.”

“The enemy is five-thousand strong. You can’t win by yourself.”

There was a commotion among the prisoners.

Karla was right. Even with the power of Core Implosion, going up against the Daydream Unit was too much. The best course of action would be to ask other nations for reinforcements...but would they respond? This wasn’t war for entertainment. It was real. It was highly likely they would refuse.

“Even so, I will fight. It’s what I must do.”

“You can’t do it alone. My ninjas say they’re heading for Faure while attacking cities in their way, and they’re leaving a trail of corpses behind... The Daydream Unit is incredibly powerful. It’s too dangerous.”

“Ms. Melka...how about we run? We’re gonna get killed. This reeks of death.”

“Shh! Silence, stupid Thio! Pay attention, the new generation of commanders is about to come up with a genius plan! Can’t you see that sharp look on Karla Amatsu’s face?!”

“...Ahem. What I mean is, we need a plan first. Just going by yourself without thinking would get you killed.”

“Weren’t you supposed to be so strong that you could destroy the universe, Ms. Imperial Saber?”

“.....Yes, but we have to come up with a strategy, just to be sure.”

“Why the long pause?”

Someone sighed. “It’s over. We can’t stop Madhart from taking over the world.” People started clutching their hair.

Sure enough, the situation wasn’t good. An army of five thousand was too

great for the exhausted forces of the Mul-Heaven Alliance to handle. They may have exposed the Daydream Paradise's secrets, but it was no use if they were defeated by sheer force in the end. They needed people from all over the world to join hands and stand up against evil.

To achieve that, though, they first needed a way to make them think they could win. An overwhelming power that could light the fire in the hearts of the people of the world.

Karla Amatsu didn't have that power. She couldn't actually destroy the universe.

Nelia looked around for Terakomari Gandesblood. She was carefully placing Villhaze on the floor, a sad expression on her face.

"Komari, can we talk?"

"Wh-what's up?"

Nelia slowly approached her, but then Sakuna Memoir hurriedly stood in her way.

"I still can't trust you, Ms. Nelia. Stay away from Ms. Komari."

"Calm down. I'm Komari's mistress."

"Bwuh? M-mi-mi-mis—"

She pushed away the silver vampire and stood before Komari. The latter looked up at her with a surprised expression. They needed Komari to use her powers, the ones she'd used during the Crimson Match to defeat the terrorists and freeze part of Gerra-Aruka territory.

Only she couldn't activate her Core Implosion at will. She didn't even know there was such power hidden within her.

What could possibly be the trigger? Nelia thought, then remembered how she'd acted during their tea party. What Villhaze said when they entered the Daydream Paradise, about how strongly she refused to drink her blood six years ago. There had to be a reason.

"Komari, I want to fight by your side. You feel the same way, right?"

She opened her eyes wide for a moment before answering, “Of course. I can’t let that guy get away with hurting Vill and everyone else.”

“Good.”

She spun her swords, then felt a slight pinch. The blade slashed the skin on her right arm, and blood dripped down to her fingertips.

Everyone around screamed. Komari took a step back.

“Wh-what are you doing?! You trying to mimic Psycho Mask?!”

“This is to thank you for letting me suck your blood.”

“What?! Wait, no, I’m fine, really!”

“You gave me yours, and now you must take mine. Or I’ll be sad.”

“I—I appreciate the gesture, really. I’ll drink a cup of tomato juice in your honor. How about that?”

“No, that’s no good. This is a ritual to prove our trust in each other, remember?”

Nelia stooped down to match Komari’s eyeline.

Komari was looking down, her face red. Sakuna Memoir was behind her speaking in an icy tone—“Huh? You drank her blood? What? Explain yourself”—but Nelia ignored her.

“Come, drink my blood.”

“N-no! I can’t! I didn’t tell you before, but I really hate blood!”

“Don’t be picky. You’re so short because you don’t drink enough, aren’t you?”

“Ugh... I drink milk, though! I’m still growing!”

Nelia felt sadistic pleasure as she saw Komari crawl away...but this wasn’t the time to indulge in fetishes. She needed her to unleash her full power, or Gerra-Aruka would be destroyed.

“Komari, I’m serious. You have great potential. You’ll see once you drink my blood.”

“...You mean I’ll be six feet tall if I drink it?”

“That’s not what I mean. I mean the powers sleeping within you.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“My mentor was your mother. We’re like sisters. Can’t you trust your sister just this once?”

“But...”

“I want to change the world together with you. I know we can do it.”

“...”

Komari stayed silent for a while, but then determination burned in her eyes.

“I can’t let that guy get away with it... The world doesn’t belong to Madhart; it belongs to everyone...”

“Yes.”

“I don’t get it, but sure, I wanna fight by your side.”

Nelia cracked a smile. That vampire really understood her better than anyone else... She swore she would one day make Komari her servant.

Nelia pushed her fingers inside Komari’s mouth.

At first, Komari squirmed in retaliation, but the shift came quickly.

The world turned golden.



Video proof was broadcast throughout the world.

Although it was unnecessary—millions of people throughout the world saw her mana.

The emotionless, machinelike soldiers of the Daydream Unit obliterated the cities, turning them into ruins in less than an hour. The people had given up, fearful of Gerra-Aruka’s might.

“The world is about to change.” “Madhart will own everything.” “There’s no future for us.” “So begins the era of the Warblades.” Despair spread like disease.

But then hope arrived. The blue sky was shining golden from the far east.

“What is that?”

It looked like a golden dragon ascending to the heavens. In truth, it was a tremendous accumulation of mana. A power so overwhelming, it cut everything to pieces and into nothingness.

“Look at this, everyone! Commander Terakomari Gandesblood has finally unleashed her true power!”

So said the voice coming from the screen in the sky.

That was all the people needed to understand. A hero had stood up for them at last. The supreme commander who would dye the heavens in crimson, Terakomari Gandesblood.

There was nothing to fear anymore. Divine punishment had come for the wicked president.

People started yelling her name: “Komarin! Komarin!” They screamed at the top of their lungs as they had during the Crimson Match. The shouts soon filled the city as everyone cheered for her. The sadness caused by the Daydream Unit vanished.

She had the power to wash away despair.

Yet none of the cheers reached Komari’s ears.

The only thing on her mind...was to murder those who threatened the world. To work with Nelia and crush Madhart’s ambitions. Nothing more.

A powerful mana storm blew inside the Daydream Paradise.

It was golden mana, colored by vicious bloodlust. Everyone present was shocked into silence. Karla Amatsu’s knees gave in, and Koharu barely managed to hold her up.

The mighty mana vortex was blinding, and at the center of it all was Terakomari Gandesblood.

Golden mana flowed from her body, as if to envelop the whole world.

She had a blank expression, but there was a resolute glow to her crimson eyes.

Suddenly, Terakomari raised her hand smoothly, like petting a cat. Mana concentrated in the air and formed an object: a golden sword. She grabbed the hilt emotionlessly, then swung it hard, as if to test it.

An indescribable shock wave shook the underground. The aftereffect of a violent mana slash. It broke through the ceiling of the prison and the rocks on the surface, all the way to the sky.

Blue skies and sunlight came in through the hole in the ceiling, and Terakomari's bloodlust overflowed outside.

Her appearance was that of a typical Warblade.

She held the golden sword in her right hand while countless other blades encompassed her, spinning alongside her radius. This was the power of the strongest Core Implosion known among the six nations—the *Blood Curse*. Saber Hills and Blade Groves—the ultimate power brought about by Warblade blood that gave her control over all weapons.

"W-wow...that's amazing, Commander Gandesblood!" Melka approached her, shaking in awe.

She snatched the electrovideo box away from the catgirl's hands and pointed it at the supreme ruler to interview her.

"Look at this, everyone! Commander Terakomari Gandesblood has finally unleashed her true power! The world will be saved now! Five thousand men are nothing against her! Commander Gandesblood, if you could give us a comment!"

She pointed the mic at Komari. *Idiot, you'll get killed*, thought everyone.

The sword slowly rose.

"Um, I think I left the stove on; I'm going home," Karla said and turned around.

The golden vampire princess pointed the shining sword at the Divine Instrument, at the eyes of everyone in the world, and said: "Gerra-Aruka is dead."



The entire world trembled.

Terakomari Gandesblood's mana ran through all the six nations' main cities at the speed of light, injecting hope to some and despair to others, even pulling some up from the depths of hell.

"The commander... The commander has awakened!"

The fortress city of Carnalt, within the Dark Core Zone. The vampires whom Illustrious General Pascal Rainsworth had slain were beginning to come back to life thanks to the Dark Core. The healing speed was abnormal. They had been lifted up from the underworld simply because of Commander Komarin's voice.

"Pfft. Heh-heh... You got us there for a moment, rusted bastards...," Caostel Conto said, drenched in blood and looking like a criminal who'd gotten beat to a pulp after his victim resorted to excessive self-defense.

The rest of the Seventh Unit also woke up one after the other, hatred burning in their eyes. They all despised the rusted from Gerra-Aruka.

It wasn't just the Seventh Unit. Memoir's Sixth Unit, Delphyne's Fourth Unit, and even Karla Amatsu's unit came back to life.

"Core, Dark Core... Move all that is quiet. Mid-level healing spell: *Supply Stimulation*."

It was Delphyne's magic. The masked vampire had built up a resistance to cuts due to the nature of her coagulation magic; Rainsworth hadn't slashed her deeply, so the vampire's wounds healed faster than anyone else's.

Delphyne looked up at the eastern sky towards the Daydream Paradise.

A golden pillar towered in the horizon as if to pierce the heavens. A different color from last time, but it was no doubt Terakomari's doing. She had finally awakened.

"What's...the situation?"

"The enemy forces number five thousand. They have conquered every city they passed through on their march to Faure."

Five thousand was certainly a shocking number. How did they get that many? Still, no one who knew Terakomari Gandesblood could've been scared. It wasn't

certain that the vampire princess could defeat them by herself—but the fact remained that she served as a light showing the way to the people of the world. Just that much was clear from looking around; the fire in people's heart was about to spark.

The Seventh Unit ran at top speed. They couldn't stand back.

"Let's go support Commander Terakomari Gandesblood. March!"

What are they so excited about? It's merely Core Implosion, the Haku-Goku Commonwealth's Secretary General scoffed internally.

Yet it couldn't be denied that Terakomari Gandesblood's awakening had shaken all nations.

The Crimson Match was simply entertainment, but things were different now. Nations could fall, so everyone had been shivering at the thought of the unprecedented event, when she along came Komari, who said Gerra-Aruka was "dead." The statement wiped away all fears.

The first to move was the Heavenly Paradise. They sent their two units stationed at Faure back to protect their mainland to the Dark Core Zone.

Then it was the Lapelico Kingdom—Lieutenant Hades Molekikki acted of his own accord. He rallied his troops to support Commander Gandesblood, and then the rest of the beast-folk, both herbivore and carnivore, followed in a rampage.

Next was the Enchanted Lands, sending all troops. The Gongzhu, Lingzi Ailan, one of the Three Draconic Meteors, told her father, the Tianzi, to "stop sitting on the fence" and led her own troops to the Dark Core Zone.

The last one to act, begrudgingly, was the Haku-Goku Commonwealth. They judged things would not look so bright for them later if they didn't go with the flow, and so they did. They temporarily joined the Mul-Heaven Alliance and gave Commander Prohellya Butchersky (who had escaped Faure by herself) a unit to lead.

Furthermore, Nelia had freed every single one of the prisoners in the Daydream Paradise and exposed the president's wrongdoings in an interview with Melka and Thio.

The protests at the Republic's capital were turning violent. Illustrious General Salt Aquinas was killed after getting hit with a metallic bat from behind while trying to suppress the revolt.

The people looked for Madhart in the biggest riot in the country's history.

"Follow Commander Nelia!"

"Down with Madhart! Revolution for Aruka!"

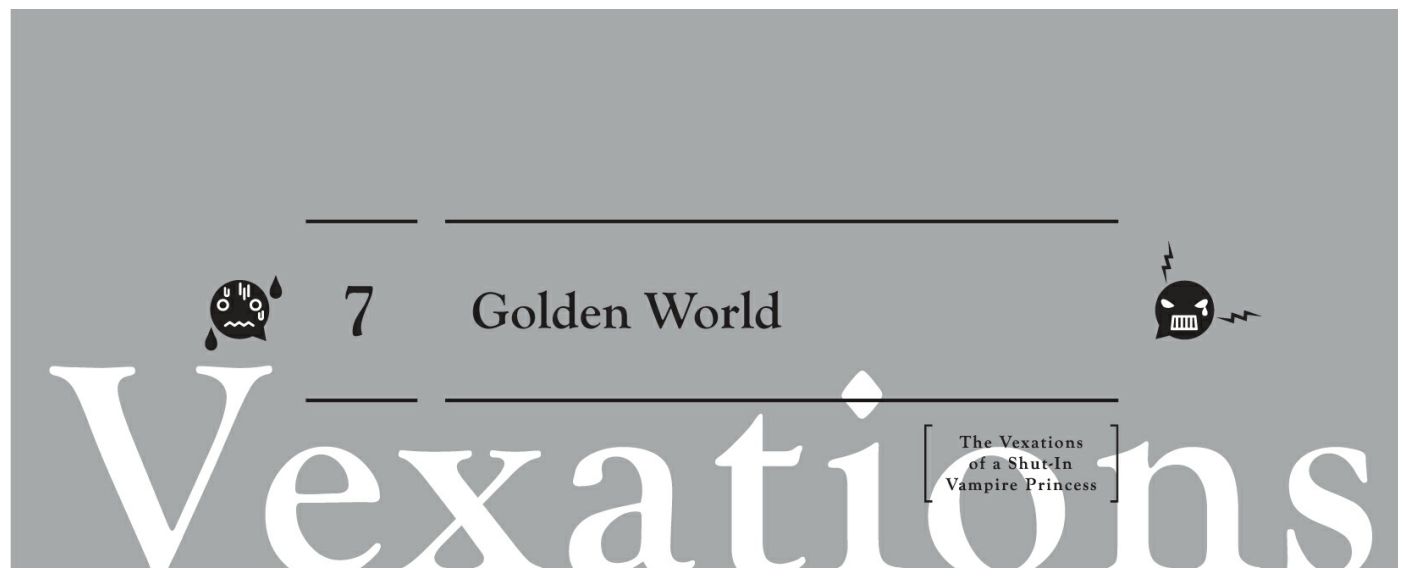
"It's the time to stand up! The six nations are uniting against evil!"

"Komarin!! Komarin!! Komarin!! Komarin!! Komarin!! Komarin!!"

People throughout the world cheered her name.

The Gerra-Aruka Republic turned into the clear villain.

Two girls stood as the vanguard of the people charging against the enemy, carrying the expectations and hopes for all nations on their shoulders.



His hometown was sold by the tyrant king to a foreign power.

The buyer was the Haku-Goku Commonwealth. The new rulers, the Sapphires, were gloomy and cold like the winter sky. The discriminatory looks on their faces as they scowled at the Warblades were commonplace. “Damn rusted.” “Savage blades.” They called them all sorts of names. They laughed behind their backs, shoved them out of the blue, and threw filth at their houses.

He endured the blatant discrimination all while protecting his young sister.

He endured it all while the fire of revenge burned inside his heart. The ire toward other races who tormented him grew bigger and bigger, as did his anger toward the opportunist king who’d sold his hometown and the unfair world that had dealt him such a hand.

His only choice was to become stronger. He needed the strength to take it all back.

So when he turned fifteen, he and his sister traveled to the capital of Aruka. He went there to join the royal army and train. He couldn’t stand serving the king he loathed, but he had no choice but to work for the government if he wanted to prosper in this nation, which valued military power over everything else.

“What? You’re just a kid. Go away.”

He was prepared to be rejected at the front gate. The king was beginning to downsize the army, so it was unlikely they would hire new soldiers, much less a kid of unknown origin. Still, he asked time and again. Even on rainy and windy

days, he went there every time and rubbed his forehead on the ground, begging.

“You’re annoying. Keep doing this, and I’ll chop your head off.”

“Why don’t you just let him join?”

From the gate to the Illustrious Tower appeared a girl with peach-colored hair.

The guard looked at her in dismay.

“Princess Nelia! Whatever could bring you here?”

“I’m just out for a walk. So...you.”

He looked up at the girl. Her smile was bright, brimming with confidence.

“I’ve seen you come here every day. You have guts. I think you would make a decent pawn for me to take over the world. I’ll ask Madhart to let you into the royal army.”

She reached out her hand. In the eyes of this young man who had lost his hometown, who had suffered under the Sapphires’ discrimination, who had come all the way to the royal capital on his own two feet... In the eyes of Pascal Rainsworth, this girl seemed like a goddess.

It was then that he decided to take over the world for her.

Perhaps his feelings were close to romantic then. But it didn’t take much for this yearning to take a twisted turn.

While Rainsworth was working hard as a soldier, Nelia’s vampire mentor was guiding her in the wrong direction. Madhart had been cultivating in her mind the idea that all other races should be at the Warblades’ feet up until then, and now she was talking about altruism and peace—concepts that were laughable to Rainsworth, who had lived through the Sapphires’ abuse. He couldn’t believe she was taking them seriously.

Rainsworth warned her about it many times. He explained how Warblades were superior, how inferior other races were, particularly Sapphires and vampires, and how meaningless all the peace talk coming out of the king’s mouth was. He tried to remind her time and again that the Aruka Kingdom shall

rule the world. But she did not understand.

“You’re as stubborn as Madhart.”

“You think you can be friends with other races?”

“Yes, we must share the pudding.”

Rainsworth was growing angrier. He had joined the royal army in order to exact his revenge—and in order to take over the world. He had trained hard, and his efforts were beginning to bear fruit. He was ready to give the world to Nelia. He never spared any effort in order to make her happy.

He knew soon enough that he wasn’t the only one with worries. His commander, Madhart, looked at the bigger picture and made the rational decision.

“Princess Nelia has become useless. Aruka will become a puppet to Mulnite and Haku-Goku if we let her become queen.”

So the coup began. Royalty and nobility were captured and imprisoned in the Daydream Paradise. The monarchy fell, giving birth to the Gerra-Aruka Republic. He remembered well Nelia’s face back then—her pale look of despair after she lost everything.

Nelia should have been sent to the Daydream Paradise with everyone else, but Rainsworth wouldn’t have it. He needed her to witness the moment Gerra-Aruka took over the world; perhaps she would reconsider then.

“Mr. President, please leave Nelia Cunningham in my care. We can use her.”

His request was almost entirely motivated by personal feelings, but Nelia was saved. Rainsworth sent his sister, Gertrude, to be Nelia’s maid so she could observe her twenty-four seven. The Moonpeach Princess, however, did not give in.

“Go to hell, Rainsworth. I’m not doing as you please.”

Her scornful glare pained his heart. She followed her words and trained hard enough to earn the title of Illustrious General, all while holding the desire to bring down Madhart.

He was disgusted with all of it. So he planned to lure her into a trap.

Once kicked down to the trenches of despair again, and with the world in his hands, she would finally learn that her ideals were wrong. She would see that Gerra-Aruka could obtain anything through sheer strength. And that Nelia Cunningham's heart, too, would be in his hands.

For that to come to fruition, he had to slaughter the inferior races.



The fortress city of Gredt, Mulnite territory in the Dark Core Zone, was in a panic.

The Daydream Unit was close. The sentries were looking through farsight magic from the watchtowers, gulping at the sight of the enemy.

They numbered five thousand. Each of them was expressionless, like a machine, yet overflowing with an aura of bloodlust that could be felt from far away. The troops had been brainwashed by Madhart and Rainsworth to live only to kill.

"Where are the reinforcements from the mainland?!"

"We can't reach them..."

The soldiers atop the walls were running every which way. They heard the Warblades had already destroyed the neighboring citadel, and they wouldn't stop until they wrecked everything.

Then a high concentration of mana rose from the Daydream Unit.

The Warblades shot flame spells at them. The fireballs flew at great speeds and crashed loudly into the gates. The spells didn't stop as more and more deadly fireballs hit the walls, shaking them with every strike. People shrieked and yelled.

"It's the end," someone whispered.

The soldiers watching the enemy troops approach from atop the walls fell to their knees in despair. Regular cities in the Dark Core Zone had no real defenses. They weren't built under the presumption of getting invaded. No one ever imagined war that wasn't for entertainment.

Will our city be destroyed just like the others?

Right as that thought came to everyone's mind, someone stood atop the walls.

"What...?"

It was a blue girl. A vampire with a sharp, threatening aura. A strong will burned in her eyes. *Where did she come from?* all the soldiers wondered.

She chuckled and raised her right hand.

She pointed a slender finger at the berserk Warblades about to break open the gates.

"Poor things. I'll give you the sweet release of death."

A blue flash came out her fingertip.

Advanced-level light spell: *Magic Bullet*.

Everyone assumed it would be useless...but things played out quite differently in reality.

The bullet hit the vanguard of the Daydream Unit and set off a mana explosion. The Warblades flew in separate directions, unable to resist the blast. Dust kicked up, and blood spattered everywhere. The next instant, a deafening battle cry rang out.

The people watched as troops teleported between the gates and the Warblades.

A flag emblazoned with the emblem of a bat and a ripple of blood fluttered in the wind. There was no mistaking it—this was a vampire unit from the Mulnite Empire.

The people were shocked, jaws on the floor, as they realized they had been saved by a hair's breadth.

The girl gave orders to the vampires from above the wall. The people would later come to say she led the troops with the grandeur of a Crimson Lord "Go, Fifth Unit. Alleviate their pain."



*

The Daydream Unit had been stopped in its tracks by the time Rainsworth arrived. They were right before the fortress city of Gredt.

Madhart's orders forced them to automatically head for Faure, but they weren't trained well enough, as they carelessly rampaged—and indeed, they had attacked unrelated cities on their way and appeared intent on destroying the city before their eyes, as well. They needed a supervisor.

The first thing Rainsworth tried to do was make them change course. They didn't have the time to conquer this tiny city. He got there hoping to use mass teleportation to lead them to Faure, but a battle had already broken out.

They were fighting against vampires who were wearing the Mulnite Imperial Army uniform and trying to defend the city. Rainsworth clicked his tongue. Their enemies only had about five hundred soldiers, but he couldn't afford to lose time here. They had to crush them right away and continue onward.

"How foolish Gerra-Aruka is."

Someone stood beside him in silence.

He drew his sword by reflex, and then a quiet scornful laughter rang in his ear.

"I can hear their cries. The Warblades hate their current leader."

"Who are you?!"

It was a girl dressed in blue. Clearly a vampire. He immediately understood: She was the commander of the unit defending the city. He didn't have any recollection of this Crimson Lord, however. The girl sneered at his confusion.

"Soldiers made to obey through threats are weak. You must first take over their hearts."

"Are you a Mulnite commander? Why are you here?"

"They told me to atone for my sins by getting some results. I suppose holding you back here is something, but I won't get any credit for this if she gets here anyway."

"What are you talking about?"

Rainsworth gripped his sword tightly; the girl maintained a serene expression.

“Say, you were investigating how to achieve Core Implosion at the Daydream Paradise, weren’t you? Did Inverse Moon give you some pointers?”

“Silence.”

“How foolish you are. Core Implosion is a power of the mind; hurting the body won’t get you anywhere. The only things that pain increases are fear and hatred. It doesn’t build up the mind. Master Amatsu is wrong. Don’t let him fool you into importing his Divine Instruments,” the girl said.

“I said silence!”

Rainsworth swung his sword. There was no reason to let that mysterious girl live. The vampire jumped swiftly and dodged, then floated above. Flight magic.

“Gerra-Aruka will fall, sadly.”

“Enough of your nonsense! The only one falling here will be you!”

He had nothing to worry about. He could easily rip her apart. Then he would conquer all six nations, get ahold of Nelia’s heart, and eventually become Madhart’s successor, receiving the title of president and ruling the world. Destroying Faure was only the first step.

But reality didn’t turn out as Rainsworth hoped for.

“Look at that light over there.”

“Hah?!”

The girl pointed east, and his eyes followed.

A golden mana pillar was piercing the heavens. A light so magnificent and so ominous that Rainsworth was frozen in place.

“What is that...?”

“The girl I hate more than anyone. I could kill you myself, but I suppose it would be more effective to leave the job to her. It’s in your hands for today, Terakomari.”

“Wh-what?! Wait, you...”

The blue girl disappeared. Just as Rainsworth tried searching for the closest portal to the mana source, a tremendous golden aura ran through the grasslands.

The Warblades shrieked in fear at the overwhelming mana. The powerful, bloodthirsty aura stung their skin, as though God had just descended to earth.

The sun grew dark.

Rainsworth instinctively sensed he was in danger and drew his sword. He received a staggering blow from above, and golden sparks flew. He felt the weight of it crushing his bones.

Then he saw her. The golden vampire princess who was attacking him from above.

She had crimson eyes and an expression of calm anger on her face. The full moon crest on her uniform proved that she was a commander of the Mulnite Empire.

His insides boiled in rage.

“Terakomari Gandesblood!!”

He tried pushing back with full force, but it was impossible. He then twisted his body around and escaped from his enemy’s reach. The golden sword crashed into the ground and set off a colossal mana explosion that sent all surrounding Warblades flying like paper scraps.

I don’t get it. How did she get here?

“Karma has caught up to you, Rainsworth.”

He couldn’t believe his ears. That voice belonged to the girl he so yearned for.

A sword cut away the thick dust cloud.

The pink mana and yellow mana mixed to create a spectacle out of this world.

The detestable vampire princess, Terakomari Gandesblood, held a golden sword in her right hand as an infinite number of other blades spun around her, no doubt thanks to the the power of gravity magic or something akin to it.

Beside her was the Moonpeach Princess, the so-called strongest Illustrious

General of the Republic. Nelia Cunningham's pink hair fluttered in the wind as she held twin swords in hand. Her eyes, empty and hopeless moments before, now glowed scarlet, indomitable will burning inside her as she flew down to him.

"Quite the big group. I'll slaughter every single one of them."

"Th-this has to be a joke! You should just obey me! I'll give you eternal happiness! Put down your weapons and accept it!"

"You're insane. I'm happy enough fighting by Komari's side. Don't you think so, too, Komari?" Nelia smiled at the vampire standing next to her.

Rainsworth angry enough to lose his mind.

Nelia's eyes were brimming with hope. *He* was supposed to give her that. After sending her to the depths of despair...he'd reach out...and then she would look only at him.

"DO NOT... DO NOT LOOK AT SOMEONE ELSE LIKE THAT!!"

Rainsworth took a step forward.

He wasn't about to disregard this. He had to be in control of her. Nelia Cunningham belonged to Pascal Rainsworth. He wasn't about to hand her over to some nameless vampire.

He slashed horizontally, but Nelia stopped the attack. A peach-colored flash followed. Rainsworth gave a sudden kick while gracefully twisting his torso to dodge. The twin swords then struck from an impossible angle. Blades clashed one, two, three times, high-pitched *clangs* echoing.

Then Rainsworth's sword was cut in half. The split half spun as it flew behind him.

He couldn't believe it. But he knew what it was: Core Implosion. Nelia had obtained power beyond his imagination.

Her scarlet eyes, overflowing with confidence, pierced his skull.

"No... This can't be..."

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“It’s impossible! How did Nelia Cunningham achieve Core Implosion?!”

Madhart screamed in disarray for the first time. He watched the battle in the Dark Core Zone in real time through his crystal.

“This can’t be. We haven’t trained her with Divine Instruments! How...?”

“I think you’re misunderstanding something,” the Mulnite Empress said with a sigh, sitting on the stone wall of the watchtower. “I’ve heard about this supposed training, injuring the body with Divine Instruments, but that isn’t how Core Implosion works. You can’t get it through effort or talent.”

“I don’t understand. What else is there other than effort or talent?”

“Destiny.”

Madhart clicked his tongue, but then right away, he put on his usual serene mask.

“A sloppy Core Implosion won’t change the tides of war. Rainsworth has been going through hell in the Daydream Paradise and, through sheer effort, obtained the strongest Core Implosion there is. Nelia Cunningham and Terakomari Gandesblood stand no chance.”

“I see, so he was your ace in the hole. In any case, it seems my reinforcements have arrived. Hope you don’t mind.”



Rainsworth used Void Magic—*Summoning*—to bring forth a new sword.

“What are you useless clowns doing?! Back me up!” he shouted.

“But, Lord Rainsworth! There are more enemies...”

“What?!”

Then a huge explosion went off in the middle of the Daydream Unit. The soldiers were blown away in a disgraceful manner. “Enemy attack!” “The enemy is here!” Rainsworth’s subordinates were in chaos. That gaudy explosion magic had to be none other than Petrose Calamaria.

That wasn’t all.

Battle cries shook the air from afar. An incredible number of enemies were coming at them from every direction, like a tsunami. The chimpanzee troops from the Lapelico Kingdom. The vampire troops from the Mulnite Empire. The Enchanted Lands' army, the Haku-Goku Commonwealth's, the Heavenly Paradise's...and even Gerra-Aruka's rebels.

Someone had created a portal and teleported them all here.

"My dear soldiers! Tear them apart, limb by limb! Anyone who doesn't get at least a hundred kills will be demoted to the farms to grow potatoes for the rest of their lives!" So yelled the commander of the Haku-Goku Commonwealth.

It wasn't just her—commanders of all nations howled as well.

The enemy's morale was through the roof. The golden mana engulfing the world had lifted the Mul-Heaven Alliance's spirits, and they all swung their fists, magic, and sorcery to mow down the Warblades.

Rainsworth heard snickering behind him.

"This is Madhart's supersecret unit? You know, it's unfortunate that it was kept hidden. They couldn't get any experience that way, and now they don't even know how to fight."

"Nelia! You're going down the wrong path! This is for your own good... Come to me!"

"I'm here already. Here to kill you, that is."

Nelia kicked off the ground. Rainsworth stood ready with his new sword. The twin blades left a pink trail as they moved through the air...then Rainsworth felt hostility from behind, and he threw himself to the ground to escape.

Immediately after, a golden blade stabbed the spot he was standing on before.

The attacks didn't stop there. A storm of blades, free from the laws of physics due to gravity magic, rained down on him. He desperately dodged and parried them, but then he witnessed something dreadful. The ground the blades stabbed turned golden.

No, that description wasn't right. They didn't change color. They turned *gold*

—metal.

“Hold on, Komari! I gotta be the one to end him!”

He stopped Nelia’s blow from behind, and then his blade once again split in two.

Golden blades shot at his back once more. Rainsworth clenched his teeth and distanced himself.

Almost twenty meters from him was the golden vampire, expressionless, like a soldier of the Daydream Unit—but with clear hostility and bloodlust in her eyes, which glared intently at him.

Anger boiled in the pit of his stomach.

Calm down and think. This is all because of that cocky little bitch. She gave Nelia false hope; she’s riling up the whole world for nothing. She’s an obstacle. She’s standing in the way of Gerra-Aruka’s glory. I have to get rid of her.

“Warblades! You take care of Nelia Cunningham!” Rainsworth yelled, and the soldiers rushed at her.

“Get out of my way!” Nelia screamed as she fiercely attacked.

She chopped down some of them with a swing of her twin blades, but more and more kept coming her way, leaving her with no room to move. Now he wouldn’t have to worry about his back for the time being.

“Die, vampire!”

He sprinted, keeping his center of gravity low.

All the pain he’d endured in the Daydream Paradise came to mind. All those memories full of anger, sadness, and desire. Many times he thought of running away, to not have the Divine Instruments wound him again, but he endured and persisted in hopes of achieving glory. He thought about those despairful days.

Core Implosion: *Adamant Steel.*

Rainsworth’s eyes glowed scarlet.

His body turned cold, into adamant that blocked any attack from the outside world. In Madhart’s words: *“You are simultaneously the sharpest spear and the*

strongest shield.”

The power of Adamant Steel reflected all blows.

He could never lose with that power in his hands. None of the Eight Illustrious Generals had managed to hurt him in fact.

Just from the nature of its powers, it was obvious his Core Implosion was the strongest.

The weakness of Core Implosion was that it prevented the wielder’s wounds from healing, since they activated it by severing their ties with the Dark Core. But with Rainsworth’s power preventing him from being injured in the first place? He was invincible.

“Die, Terakomari Gandesblood!!” Rainsworth yelled as he held his sword high.

Right then, the daggers spinning all around Terakomari shot at him.

He had no need to guard himself against them; his Core Implosion would take care of it. Any slash was but the slap of a piece of paper to his adamant body.

Or so it should have been.

“Gwah?!”

Pain ran through his left shoulder. He lost his balance and fell down on the gold ground.

How? Adamant Steel was protecting his body, and yet his shoulder was wounded. Blood was gushing out of it, the red liquid turning gold right before his eyes as it dripped to ground.

He felt chills run down his spine.

This isn’t real.

“It is real.”

“Wha—?!”

Rainsworth had a dreadful feeling; he jumped back.

Terakomari shot blades flying at incredible speeds.

The downpour of killing steel stabbed the ground hard, setting off explosions

of golden mana with every crash.

Rainsworth dodged it all in a panic. He was using Core Implosion—any death would be definitive. He had to quite literally run for his life. What if he stopped using his power? Then he would have no chance of winning. But did he, though, in the first place?

One of the blades pierced a fellow Warblade, blowing him away.

There was already carnage going on all around him. The Daydream Unit was nearing annihilation. The troop had been formed out of puppets, forced to become soldiers through threats and torture—they never had a shred of loyalty to their nation. Some of them were still fighting, but others were already free from the brainwashing, running away in disarray.

The failings of the Daydream Paradise were on full display.

Rule by violence would eventually collapse. Madhart had it all wrong.

“Damn it... Damn it, damn it, damn it all! Fight, you bastards!!” Rainsworth roared.

None could hear his yells among the battle cries of the enemy soldiers. The inferior mongrels who weren’t fighting watched from afar as they clapped and exclaimed: “*Komarin!! Komarin!! Komarin!! Komarin!!*”

“*You can do it!*”

“*Take down Gerra-Aruka!*”

“*You lowly...cocky pieces of shit!!*”

Rainsworth charged, as if to erase every trace of the weakness that had budded within him.

Komarin? Warblades should be the ones ruling over the vampires! They’re livestock! This is all nothing but a stepping stone in Gerra-Aruka’s path to rule the world! That arrogant little bitch doesn’t understand. It’s time I made her understand!

He dodged the barrage of swift, endless blades by a hairbreadth. Some of them grazed him, blood spurting with each slash, but he did not stop. Madhart’s rule would be over if he didn’t stop her. He couldn’t allow that to

happen.

“AAAAHHH!!”

He swept sideways, his full weight on the sword.

Terakomari swung her golden blade at an imperceptible speed.

Golden mana raged all around as the loud *clang* of the clash echoed.

Rainsworth’s sword was split in half, then vanished.

“Wha—?! Shit!!”

Rainsworth desperately forged mana to shoot multiple *Magic Bullets*. Warblades were never good at magic; there was no way this last-ditch attempt would have an effect on that monster.

The swords spinning around Terakomari elegantly blocked each of the *Magic Bullets*, creating explosions with every hit. At the center of the blasts, the girl sighed, scattering golden particles as she did.

“Give it up.”

“Lowly vampire!”

His hands were shaking out of rage. He fully concentrated on summoning a replacement sword. Yet it turned to dust in an instant—her golden sword had broken it before he realized. Impossible. How? How could this be happening?

“You...”

It was only a moment of distraction when a swift slash came at him.

He took a spare knife out of his pocket and threw it, but the waves of spinning swords easily parried it. His instincts were screaming at him—he was about to die.

His mana connected him to the Dark Core once again. He stopped using his Core Implosion. There was no escaping it.

“You were wrong.”

“I—I WON’T ACCEPT IT!!”

Just as he screamed, a golden flash slashed through the air, cutting his entire

body diagonally.

Blood spurted out like a broken dam.

Insurmountable pain rushed throughout his body, and just as he saw his blood freeze into gold in the air, he lost all will to fight.

He fell to his knees.

The enemy was too powerful.

How did this happen? Gerra-Aruka was the strongest nation, the one that was going to rule them all. How could he lose to a vampiric gremlin? His hatred flowed out of his mouth in curses: “I—I will kill you! You will die by my hand! Then you’ll know your place, vampire! You lowly bunch are nothing but slaves! Gerra-Aruka won’t lose to a little—”

“Gerra-Aruka will fall.” Peach-colored mana blew in the wind.

Nelia Cunningham.

The girl Rainsworth so yearned for. The Moonpeach Princess was looking down at him with cold eyes, an expression far from the gentle smile of the past.

Her words he had nearly forgotten then came back to mind, like parts of his life flashing before his death.

“Nelia, I... I love...”

“Rainsworth, I hate your way of thinking.”

“Wow. You’ll make a great commander one day.”

“I can’t let someone like you, hurting other people as he pleases, go free.”

“You didn’t get to be one of the Eight Illustrious Generals? Oh right, because my father cut them down to two.”

“Maybe you were doing what you thought was best for Aruka and the Warblades.”

“But don’t worry, I know you’ll be rewarded eventually, so long as you keep hanging in there.”

“But you put your effort in the wrong place.”

“I’m rooting for you. I look forward to seeing what a strong country you build, future commander.”

“Aruka...is better off without you, Rainsworth.”

“Nelia, move.” The golden vampire appeared from behind Nelia.

A mass of hostile mana poured down.

Golden particles shone so bright all around him that he couldn’t keep his eyes open.

He barely saw the tip of the sword pointed at him and the dreadful scarlet glow staring at him.

Terakomari Gandesblood lifted the sword high.

In Rainsworth’s eyes, she looked like a golden grim reaper descending from the heavens.

“S-sto—”

“Think about what you’ve done.”

The sword fell down on him like a comet, dyeing the surroundings in a golden light.



There was cheering everywhere.

People from all nations, from all cities, vampires, Peace Spirits, Sapphires, beast-folk, Immortals, Warblades—all of them equally cheered with enthusiasm.

The five thousand men of the Daydream Unit were but corpses now, crushed by the golden sword.

Madhart had nothing more up his sleeve. It was only a matter of time until his demise.

At first glance, it seemed like Terakomari Gandesblood’s lone feat, but it most certainly wasn’t so. It was all thanks to the people she influenced—the people of the six nations who came together to bring down the destroyer of peace.

“Heh...good job, Komari.”

The meadows were turned gold due to Komari's mana.

First she'd frozen over the land; now she turned it golden. What more could her powers be hiding? How strong could her spirit be to give birth to such a power? It made Nelia feel both frightful and encouraged.

"Komarin!! Komarin!! Komarin!! Komarin!!"

The ovation echoed throughout the golden land. Endless praise for the girl who changed history of the six nations.

Nelia stared at the golden vampire beside her.

She was still emitting a tremendous amount of mana. That, plus the cheers all over, made her feel a little bit jealous.

Then Komari grabbed Nelia's sleeve.

Nelia looked at her, enduring the overwhelming mana flowing out of her.

"Yes?"

"Next."

"Next what?"

It took her a moment, but then she understood.

There was still something left to do.

They had to get rid of the root of all this evil.



They found where he was.

The people rushed the former palace looking for Madhart, the man who'd begun all this chaos.

The screen floating over the capital showed the progress of the war in real time. *"Look at the mountains of dead bodies! Commander Terakomari Gandesblood has wiped out the Gerra-Aruka army! We are witnessing history unfold before our very eyes!"* the reporter said while showing pictures of the scene. The once-green grasslands were now sickeningly golden.

The Eight Illustrious Generals had all been defeated. Madhart's secret

Daydream Unit was annihilated thanks to her golden swords. The reality inside the Daydream Paradise was exposed, and its prisoners were set free. The riots criticizing the president were increasing in intensity.

He had nothing left.

“It’s over for you, Mr. President,” said the blond vampire.

Madhart looked at her with his jaw agape. She didn’t look the slightest bit elated about her victory, as though she had expected this outcome from the very beginning.

“There is no future for Gerra-Aruka. Quit already.”

“Th-this isn’t fair!” Madhart stood up, fist in the air. “How were we supposed to stand a chance against that Core Implosion?! No plan could’ve ever worked! Were you just playing with us this whole time?! Laughing at us as you knew the Warblades could never defeat Terakomari Gandesblood?!”

“How could I laugh? I was worried sick for Komari. She doesn’t even know about her powers; she could’ve died easily, worst-case scenario.”

“You’re joking...”

“Madhart,” the Empress said as she stared at the golden sky. “I aim to take over the world, but I won’t do it your way. My goal isn’t to monopolize the globe—I, the Mulnite Empire, want to create an ideal world, where people help one another.”

“Ridiculous. You could easily take over the world using force with Terakomari Gandesblood’s powers. I would’ve done it already.”

“Her power isn’t meant for killing people. It’s meant for killing scum like you.”

“You just said it wasn’t meant for killing!”

“Right, I got that wrong. Let me rephrase that. Her role is to defeat villains like you and bring hope to the world, guide people’s hearts in the right direction.”

“Guide people’s hearts? Are you fooling around with me?”

“Komari saved Nelia Cunningham back there. The Moonpeach Princess is no longer your slave. She will become a leader, and many will support her. And

those inspired by Nelia will do away with that stupid idea of conquering others with force.”

“...”

“When more people turn away from such thoughts, the ideal nation I’m looking for will be born. Hopefully.”

“That’s not happening. People can’t think of anything but themselves. That’s why I did it all for Gerra-Aruka’s sake and its sake only. I killed that complacent king, established the Republic, and built the Daydream Paradise. I gathered the strongest Eight Illustrious Generals in order to build a paradise for the Warblades. And that was completely ruined by a little girl, of all things...”

“It seems there’s no use talking to you any further. It’s over now.”

People would later talk about this event as “an angel’s descent.”

The golden mana brought light to the Gerra-Aruka Republic, which was shrouded in darkness. A girl appeared out of the blue from the heavens: Terakomari Gandesblood. Clinging to her was the descendant of the old Aruka king: Nelia Cunningham.

The people cheered at the skies as the two girls descended on the old palace’s clocktower. Like angels about to hand divine punishment upon evil.

“Th-this can’t be...”

“Yes it can. Give it up, Madhart.”

“...” Madhart sighed.

It was checkmate.

The past five years flashed through his mind like shooting stars.

He’d given it his all for Aruka’s future. He’d established the republic to prevent it from falling to ruin due to the king’s selfish pacifist ideas. Aruka tradition said they did not spare any effort to obtain whatever they desired, and he merely put it into action through his policies. He spared no expense for the sake of his country and its people.

But that wasn’t what the people wanted. It was also his duty as president to

respect the Warblades' choices.

Terakomari Gandesblood and Nelia Cunningham softly descended before Madhart as the people cheered them on.

There was no use for a ruler unwished for by the people.

However.

A story was always better when the villain acted like one until the bitter end.

Madhart spread his arms wide and exclaimed:

"You've come far, young heroes! But I will not let you interfere with my ambitions. I have no choice except to fight you myself. But if our powers clash here, many people will die as collateral. So why don't we join hands? With your magical power and my political power, we could rule the whole world."

The golden sword and peach twin swords pointed at him.

In unison, they replied:

"No."

"No, thanks."



A golden flash surged, and the Gerra-Aruka Republic's short history came to a close.



Six Nations News, July 27th Morning Edition

THE SIX NATIONS WAR COMES TO A CLOSE. PRESIDENT MADHART DEFEATED?

IMPERIAL CAPITAL—BY MELKA TIANO

The Mulnite government announced on the 26th that they defeated President Madhart of the Gerra-Aruka Republic. The invasion that took place on the 25th, a “war not for entertainment purposes,” now referred to as the Six Nations War, has ended for now.

...

Mul-Heaven Alliance leader and Crimson Lord Terakomari Gandesblood's feats are dazzling once again, this time quite literally as she spread a golden glow throughout the world. It was also thanks to Illustrious General Nelia Cunningham and Imperial Saber Karla Amatsu that the inhumane experiments carried out in the Daydream Paradise resort came to light, exposing just how cruel and violent Madhart's administration was.

...

The Gerra-Aruka Republic is planning to hold an election this September to replace its missing president. Many Warblades have announced their run for the title, but Commander Cunningham is the one expected to take the victory, thanks to her achievements in the Six Nations War.



The Gerra-Aruka Republic fell, but the monarchy did not come back. The people didn't want that. Soon the country would change its name to the Aruka Republic.

"This place has changed a lot."

Nelia sighed as she stood before the palace, which had been half turned to gold due to Komari's mana.

The capital was celebrating the demise of its tyrant. There was no stopping the festivities.

People everywhere were waving flags with her and Komari's face on them. Extremely embarrassing...but something to be proud of at the same time. The enthusiasm was proof that her ambitions had finally been achieved.

"Lady Nelia, I am sorry for being late."

A maid was standing near the golden hedges.

There was no sign of her once-lively smile. Her servant, Gertrude, was looking at her, cowering like a puppy that was just scolded at.

"Late you are. You called me here yourself."

"I'm sorry... I overslept."

"Clumsy no matter what, huh?"

Gertrude had called Nelia's Correspondence Crystal the day before.

"I want to talk. Please come to the royal palace at noon tomorrow."

It was four in the afternoon. Nelia had also overslept by three hours, though.

“Sorry. I’m so sorry, Lady Nelia... I was a fool. I thought it was for your own sake when I gouged your belly.”

“Don’t worry about that. So...you’re here to apologize?”

“Yes. I don’t know how to make it up to you. Should I say sorry a million times? Ten million times?”

Nelia sighed.

She was Madhart’s and Rainsworth’s underling, but it didn’t feel as though it was the time to call her out for it yet.

“I thought defeating my brother and Madhart would be impossible. That you would continue to suffer for holding an unrealistic ideal...,” said Gertrude through tears.

“And that’s why you tried to make me give up?”

“Yes. To tell the truth, I told my brother many times to listen to what you were saying.”

“I’m sure it was all for nothing, knowing him.”

“He never listened. He’s too selfish. That’s why...I felt sorry for you, because I thought your efforts would never bear fruit. I thought it would be better for you to let it go and live in peace...but I was wrong.”

“It was all thanks to Komari.”

“...You don’t need me, do you?”

Nelia slowly came close to her. Gertrude shut her eyes tight, thinking she would hit her, but not once did Nelia consider it—the blow she had dealt back at the Daydream Paradise was enough. Nelia stood before her and held her tight. She felt she needed to do that.

“Huh? What???”

Gertrude was flustered. It was clear that the maid cared for Nelia—but her worries had led her to take a twisted turn. She’d meant no harm. A benevolent mistress would forgive and accept her back.

“Aruka will become better and better from now on, but I can’t do it alone. I need your help.”

“But I...I was Madhart’s underling.”

“It doesn’t matter. Leave the past in the past. Consider this: If the Eight Illustrious Generals, who were obediently wagging their tails for him, would now agree with my ideas, I would use them, too.”

“Even my stupid brother?”

“I’m not against making him my servant if he’s willing to obey me. Gertrude...I need your help. Won’t you come with me again?”

“Lady Nelia...”

Gertrude wept. Immeasurable guilt consumed her soul from within... but Nelia was prepared to give her plenty of work, and enough reasons to live and enough happiness, to make her forget about it.

Gertrude wiped her tears with Nelia’s clothing and, with a faltering voice, said: “I’ll try to be a better maid—one who doesn’t gouge her mistress’s belly.”

“I’ll be sure to punch you right in the face if you ever betray me again.”

Nelia smiled, but the girl in her arms shivered.

“Lady Nelia, there’s one more thing I didn’t tell you.”

“Another blunder? I’m ready to forgive most things.”

“No...” She stepped back and looked at the half-golden-dyed palace. The former residence of the royal family and Nelia’s past home. She felt a tinge of nostalgia, but what she saw then made her doubt her eyes.

Someone was standing by the fountain in the front garden.

Nelia thought it was a ghost, but it couldn’t be. He had a gaunt body, his cheeks were hollow, and his clothes were plain, unlike a king’s, but there was no mistaking him. It’d been five years, but his kind aura hadn’t changed at all.

“Dad...!”

Nelia widened her eyes, then took a step forward. The man, Nelia’s father and the last king of the Aruka Kingdom, approached her slowly, like a ghost.

“Nelia...I’m glad you made it here.”

She wanted to run up to him and hug him, but she was so shocked, she couldn’t move. She was about to cry when her father walked right up to her. The person she’d wanted to meet for so long, for five long years since Madhart ruined the peace, was finally before her eyes.

“Dad...you’re okay! I’m sorry I couldn’t save you.”

“No, you did well.” He smiled. “Gertrude told me all about what you did. You trained hard to become an Illustrious General and to stop Madhart, and then you liberated the Daydream Paradise. You’re a much more impressive Warblade than I ever was.”

She was trembling. She felt like it was a dream.

There was so much she wanted to ask, so much she wanted to say, but the words were stuck in her throat. She felt fulfilled just by hearing her father praise her efforts. Nelia wiped her tears and looked away, blushing.

“You’re great, too. You’re the best...”

“Not at all. I was wrong. I should’ve listened, if only a little, to what Madhart said. Not trying to understand how he felt will forever be the biggest mistake of my life.”

“It wasn’t a mistake! It’s all Madhart’s fault!”

“Perhaps...but either way, I don’t want you to become like me. Much less like Madhart, of course. I want you to build a new Aruka.”

Nelia opened her eyes wide.

She then realized what her mission was. She had brought about a revolution, and now she had to follow through. It was her duty to create a nation that made Komari’s and Mrs. Gandesblood’s ideals a reality—a place where people acted for the sake of one another. Though she wasn’t sure if she’d win the election.

“I’ll do my best... I will dedicate my life to it.”

“Good, it seems I have nothing to worry about. You have plenty of allies, too.”

“Yes... With Komari by my side, I will be okay.”

Her father smiled, then his expression suddenly turned serious.

“There is no doubt you will be the next president, so there’s something I want you to have.”

“What is it?”

He took a dagger out of his pocket. It was in a golden sheath and looked extremely luxurious. Nelia had seen it many times before; it was a treasure handed down from generation to generation of Aruka royalty. He always had it with him, and she, as a kid, had always thought it was too gaudy and tacky.

“Madhart never uncovered the country’s secret, because I never told him. I wouldn’t talk, no matter how gruesome the torture. This is a treasure of all Warblades... I hid it in that fountain when the kingdom fell.”

He placed it in her hand and folded her fingers over it.

Nelia glanced at the shining “treasure of all Warblades” and nonchalantly asked: “What is this?”

“Aruka’s Dark Core. Take care of it.”

She nearly fainted, as did Gertrude.

The former king laughed out loud as he saw the girls panic.

“It is always the young ones who shape the future. Nelia...take care of yourself, and good luck.”



“Lady Komari, is there anything you want to eat? I can go get you some apples or oranges or grapes and feed them to you myself.”

“No. I’m tired.”

“Then how about a bath to relax? I will thoroughly clean your whole body over the course of five glorious hours.”

“You want us to end up like raisins?! Stop it! Get away from me!”

It was July 29. I was on a bed in the infirmary.

I was kinda expecting this outcome. I'd blacked out at some point and didn't clearly remember what happened. Though this time, I did have some recollection of when exactly I lost consciousness. It was when Nelia made me drink her blood at the Daydream Paradise underground. I think I just fainted out of shock from drinking that. Whatever else could it have been?

In any case, the battle between the Gerra-Aruka Republic and the Mulnite Empire had come to an end.

According to Six Nations News, I'd wiped out Madhart's five-thousand-man army. They were out of their mind. I was knocked out the whole time after drinking Nelia's blood. Yet when I told Vill it was all lies, she just laughed and went, "Yeah, yeah, sure."

"Lady Komari, there is nowhere for you to run this time," she said as she showed me a picture.

It was me with a golden mana aura (?), holding a golden sword (!) and standing in the middle of a golden meadow (!?!). Heaps of corpses were all around me, by the way.

What was she trying to prove with that? It was very obviously doctored.

"If you were trying to fake a photo of me, then at least try make it look more real. What sort of fantasy world is this?"

"It is a fantasy world. Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. You activated your Core Implosion, the *Blood Curse*, and then annihilated Gerra-Aruka's secret army."

"Did *you* see me fight all goldy like that yourself?"

"I didn't, sadly."

"There we go; it's all fake."

"No, it's true."

"If this is somehow true, then I will bathe with you every single day."

"I'll hold you to that promise."

I flinched for a second. She was serious.

Well, there was no way it was real. If I really had the power to destroy an army of five thousand by myself, then I wouldn't be suffering so much every day. I would use my power to shut myself in every day and get rid of anyone who tried to force me outside.

"I guess there's no convincing you," Vill said, sighing after seeing my stubbornness. "Still, I will always regret not being with you throughout the whole thing. The same thing happened during the Crimson Match. I always faint at the most important time. What a failure of a maid I am."

"I don't know what really happened...but you did well. You're not a failure at all."

"But Nelia Cunningham stole my time to shine. It should've been me punishing President Madhart alongside you, not her."

Right, the Gerra-Aruka Republic fell while I was knocked out. I heard there were fierce riots at their capital and then President Madhart vanished. All his wrongdoings at the Daydream Paradise came to light, the Illustrious Generals involved in it were dealt with, and now they were going to hold an election for their next leader.

"Is Nelia doing all right?"

"I don't think we need to worry about her. The people of Aruka understand Cunningham's ideology very well now. It's almost certain that the Moonpeach Princess will be the next president."

"Oh. I wonder if she'll hold a party when she wins. Do people do that?"

"No, Lady Komari, she is dangerous. She has her eyes on you. Do not support her."

"You're not on her side?"

Vill puffed her cheeks and said, "I'm on *your* side."

Sure enough, maybe that peach-color-haired girl was dangerous. I remembered what she said: that I could work only when I wanted to; that she would give me three meals a day and a nap; that the only thing I had to do was bake for her. The real danger was that her sweet words seriously made me

consider putting on the maid outfit.

Ahem.

No point thinking about the Gerra-Aruka Republic, I suppose. Her life must've been hard before, but now there was no one to stop her. There was nothing I could do anyway but support her from the shadows. Though there was still much to talk about with her the next time we meet (hopefully not touching on any violent subject). She was my mommy's protégée, after all. I'm sure we would become good friends.

“Changing the subject, here’s a present from Lady Karla Amatsu.”

“A present?”

“They’re sweets from the east. There’s also a letter. It reads: *I’m giving you this, so please never ever think about invading my country.*”

“...Why?”

“Because your Core Implosion power is just that scary. Look, her handwriting is all shaky.”

“Isn’t Karla a billion times stronger?”

“I suppose everyone has a story. Though not everyone fears you. Look, there are letters from all over the world.”

“What?! Oh gee, that’s a lot. Writing them back would take forever.”

“I will write them for you.”

“No. What are you even thinking of writing?”

"I'm telling everyone: 'Challenge accepted.'"

“...Excuse me??”

I had a terrible feeling. I checked the letters one by one.

*"Declaration of war," "declaration of war," "declaration of war," "declaration
of war," "declaration of war," "declaration of war," "declaration of war,"
"declaration of war," "declaration of war," "declaration of war," "declaration of
war," "declaration of war," "declaration of war"...*

I nearly fainted.

“Rejoice, Lady Komari. All barbarians throughout the six nations have fallen for you.”

“How am I supposed to find joy in that?! Why am I getting challenged to so many wars?!”

“Half of these are from the Chimpanzee.”

“Even then, don’t you find it weird that I’m getting so many out of nowhere?!”

“Once you finally solve that mystery, then I will get to bathe with you every day.”

“What are you talking about?!”

Suddenly, the door opened.

I turned around and saw the silver-haired girl, Sakuna Memoir, standing there. She had been visiting me every day since I woke up, bringing me snacks and fruit.

But this time, her face was pale. She looked slightly confused.

“Ms. Komari, a letter for you arrived at the Crimson Tower.”

I had a bad feeling just from hearing the word *letter*. Sakuna walked up to my bed and handed me a basket of fruits. “Here’s your gift of the day.”

“Thank you, but I can’t eat everything if you bring this much every day.”

“S-sorry. I just want you to get well soon...”

I was well already, to be quite honest. My body was just devoid of mana, so I’d been hospitalized for checkups. It was my chance to rightfully shut myself in, like back after the Crimson Match.

Sakuna started peeling a banana without asking. I couldn’t turn her down, so I opened my mouth and let her feed me. It was sweet and tasty.

“Lady Memoir...what are you doing here? We’re busy whispering sweet nothings to each other in here.” Vill said.

“No, we’re not.”

“Ah, right. I just checked the mail for the Seventh Unit and found this in there.”

I wanted to ask why she was checking the mail *for the Seventh Unit* to begin with, but I was at a loss for words when I saw the envelope she handed over. It used the same seal as the one on the invitation I received to the Warblade Tea Party. So then...

“It’s probably from Ms. Nelia Cunningham.”

“R-right. Let’s see...”

“You can see right through the envelope. It’s an invitation.”

“An invitation?”

Vill opened it without even asking me, the absolutely rude jerk, but oh well, I forgave her this time. She quickly read it.

“I see... Nelia Cunningham wants to apologize for what happened and is inviting you over to the beach.”

“Huh?”

“The beach. You love it, don’t you?”

“...”

“Wanna go?”

“.....Yes.”



Blue skies. White clouds. Warm sun and the sparkling sea.

We were at the beach. The long-awaited beach trip.

I wanted to dance and prance in joy, but an intellectual such as myself could not possibly let her emotions run wild like “Yaaay!! It’s the beach!!”

I changed into my swimsuit, in the dressing room of course, and walked with firm steps toward the coast.

I wasn’t feeling shy about it anymore. I’d become fairly used to it after my

experience from last time.

“Vill, we are here to gather materials. Our objective is to carry out a thorough investigation of what ‘playing at the beach’ is like for the sake of my novels.”

“Sure, Lady Komari. I brought a giant dolphin-shaped floatie by the way. Would you like to ride it?”

“WHAT?! It’s so CUTE! Yes, please!!”

The thoughts about my novels were no longer in my mind.

I’ll admit it. I’d been looking forward to the trip. I mean, I finally got to play around with some friends. A world beyond my imagination when I was a shut-in for three years was right before my eyes. How could I not enjoy it? I just didn’t want it to show on my face because that would be embarrassing.

Vill and I jumped into the ocean while holding the dolphin floatie. The water was cool, and so nice. Maybe I was a dolphin in my past life. I couldn’t disappoint my ancestors, then—in this life, too, I shall swim as freely as one. But swimming practice could come after a bit of fun.

“Ms. Komari, can I ride it with you?”

Sakuna approached me with excitement on her face. She was as pretty as always, so much so that even I, a renowned ultrarare knockout, couldn’t contain myself from going “Awooga!” at the sight of her in a bikini. This time, Nelia had invited her as well. The Moonpeach Princess seemed to have taken a liking to her.

“Yeah, sure. Uh, Vill, can two people ride this at the same time?”

“Yes, but that is limited to you and me. You may go gather shells over there, Lady Memoir.”

“Let’s just take turns, okay? Me first.” Sakuna clung to me.

Hmm. Déjà vu.

“This isn’t funny, Lady Memoir. I brought the dolphin. I get to enjoy it with her first.” Vill clung to me.

Stop that! You’re embarrassing me!

“But it was *me* who pumped it up...”

“Indeed, I was about to inflate it when you came and said you would do it with magic, and I must thank you for that, but I bought it.”

“But I asked her to ride together first!”

“Stop fighting! If you two wanna ride it so much, then go ahead yourselves! I’ll ride it later.”

““No point, then.””

“Why?!”

In the end, they decided it through rock-paper-scissors.

Sakuna threw paper. Vill went with scissors.

So the bikini-clad maid made a peace sign as she muttered, “Good always wins,” while Sakuna puffed her cheeks in disagreement. I thought caring about who went first was silly if everyone got to do it in the end either way, but anyhow, at least getting to see that childish expression was something good that came out of it.

“Please, Lady Komari, get on.”

“Okay.”

I somehow managed to sit on the dolphin without falling face-first on the water. Vill then proceeded to get on as well with swift movement and, at the speed of light, wrapped her arms around my belly and started groping my sides.

“Whoaaa?! H-hey, stop that!”

“I will be your safety belt. I have the duty to make sure you won’t fall. This is also a great opportunity to take some measurements. I see, I see, so for the top, we have...”

“I said stop! I don’t need a seatbelt! I have a perfect sense of balance, I’ll let you know! I can stand for thirty whole seconds on one foot and... What are you doing with that Magic Stone?”

She was holding a purple stone before I knew it, and she reached out for the dolphin’s tail as she sneered...

“Just floating around wouldn’t be much fun.”

“Nononononono.”

“Yes. Magic Stone: *Shock Wave*.”

Next thing I knew, the dolphin was flying with the wind.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!”

We were flying across the sea at a great speed. I couldn’t even keep my eyes open due to the wind, so I just held on to the dolphin for dear life while Vill held my belly. Right as I thought we were about to break the space-time continuum, I heard Sakuna yell, “Ms. Komarii!”

Then *WHOOOSH!!* I was thrown off the raging dolphin and fell headfirst into the ocean.

I nearly died then. I was flailing my limbs in a panic. Where I was, the water couldn’t have been that deep, but I still felt like I was about to drown.

“Are you okay, Ms. Komari?!”

And *splash!* I was pulled up by the arm.

All I could see was silver. A silver-haired girl. Then I realized: Sakuna had managed to save me just in time. She was looking at me with deep worry in her eyes.

“Are you hurt? Did you swallow any water?”

“I-I’m fine. Thanks, Sakuna.”

“Thank goodness.” She sighed, placing a hand on her chest.

I was also relieved, obviously. Nearly died back there. Drowning would’ve been a terrible way to go.

Fuming, I turned to look at the root of all evil.

“Vill, what in the world were you...?”

I stopped midsentence.

My maid was floating facedown on the water.

...*Huh? Vill? No way...*

“Oh no, Ms. Komari! Ms. Villhaze has fainted!”

“Whaaat?!”

Sakuna and I carried her back to the shore in a hurry. She wasn't moving. What if she died? Just as despair was taking over my mind, she broke into a coughing fit. I drew my face close to hers and shouted: “Vill! Hang in there! Are you okay?!”

“I...am not.”

“You're not?!”

“I misjudged the Magic Stone's output. I am very sorry...”

“Don't worry about that! What do we do now, Sakuna?!”

“Leave it to me! I will heal...”

Vill grabbed Sakuna's arm, as if to stop her from using magic. But why?

“Magic won't heal me. I need mouth-to-mouth.”

“What? I don't think that's right, you're breathing and talking just fine...”

“*COUGH, COUGH, CO-COUGH, COOOOUGH!*”

“Noooo!! Fine!! I-I'll do it...”

“Hold on a second, Ms. Komari, you can see her breathing just fine.”

“But Vill says she needs it! I...I have to do it...”

I grabbed her shoulders and stared straight into her eyes. My heart was beating fast. I could feel my face burning. But it was all to save a life. It couldn't be helped.

“Huh? Lady Komari...you'll really do it?”

“O-of course I will!”

“W-wait, please give me a second. I need to prepare myself...”

“I'm not waiting! Your life is on the line!”

Vill's face turned red. She had her hands frozen in place atop her chest. *I've no time to waste!* I locked my gaze onto her lips and slowly drew my face close.

I could feel her breath on my face. She closed her eyes. *Should I close them, too?* I wasn't thinking straight. Why was I even doing this? I...

"What are you all doing?"

I turned to the voice.

The Moonpeach Princess, Nelia Cunningham, was standing there. Her maid, Gertrude, was behind her. Both in swimsuits, naturally.

Then Vill came back to life. She stood up as if nothing had happened and looked right at me as she said, "I'm okay now."

"Y-you're okay now?! What about the ki...I mean, CPR?"

"It turns out I'm not ready yet."

What? Well, if she's okay, then fine, I guess? Anyway...

"Komari! Good to have you here. That swimsuit is gorgeous."

"Y-yeah. Thanks for inviting us over."

"Hee-hee. Well, we have ample time. How about we talk?" She flashed an innocent smile.

Sure enough, there were lots of things I wanted to talk about with her. After all, we hadn't talked since we'd gone our own ways at the Daydream Paradise.

Vill bought us some juice, and we were under the shade of the parasol enjoying our drinks.

On my right was Sakuna. Vill on my left. Nelia sat in front of me, and Gertrude was by her side, fanning her mistress. We were taking it easy.

"Lady Cunningham...there is something I must ask."

"What is it, Villhaze?"

"Why is that maid here like nothing happened?"

Gertrude's shoulders flinched. *Right, now that you mention it...I remember her punching us.*

"Right, sorry." Nelia apologized with one eye closed. "This is Rainsworth's little sister. She was being threatened by him, but I already gave her a good

smacking, and she won't attack you anymore. You should apologize, Gertrude."

"Y-yes...I'm very sorry for trying to kill you." The Warblade maid bowed.

Sakuna seemed fine with it, but Vill didn't even try to hide her disagreement. But yeah, Gertrude had almost killed her. What can you do? It wasn't worth worrying about, though, in my opinion—Nelia said it was okay, and I didn't feel the slightest malice coming from Gertrude.

"Vill, c'mon, it's fine."

"But..."

"She already apologized, so I'm thinking of forgiving her."

Vill begrudgingly gave in. Nelia smiled ear to ear.

"Thanks. I'll make sure to have her well-behaved at all times, so don't worry."

"P-please be gentle..."

"That will be up to you, Gertrude. Anyway...Komari." She looked me straight in the eye. "I had you come here to deepen our friendship, as well as to thank you for helping me out."

"Oh, you don't have to do that."

"No, I do. I achieved my desires entirely with your help. Thank you, Komari."

I gazed at the world-famous Moonpeach Princess's face. The armies of the world had defeated Madhart's, according to Vill, and it was pretty much the girl in front of me who'd led these troops (though it was incorrectly reported that I'd destroyed the enemies). Despite her unabashed maid fetish, she was a hero—she'd saved the world.

"Yeah... Honestly, there's nothing to thank me for. I didn't do anything."

"So you really don't remember... Should we leave it like that?"

"Yes. She won't listen, no matter how many times I try telling her," Vill said.

"Funny. Well, you changed the whole world, just with your heart."

What does that mean? I took a sip of my juice, hoping the subject would be change.

Gertrude handed Nelia a slice of watermelon, and she took a bite of it before speaking.

“Madhart was trying to take control of the world, but now everyone knows that’s wrong. I must replace him and change Aruka for the better. Komari...what kind of country do you think I should build?”

I thought for a bit before answering:

“One with good sense?”

“Right. We’ll define ‘one with good sense’ as a kind society in which people are considerate of one another. That is the utopia that your mother wanted.”

Gertrude gave watermelon slices to each of us, too. I took a bite, and my mouth was greeted with refreshing sweetness. I took a mental note to remember to play the watermelon-splitting game later.

“Both you and I inherited her will, so we should join hands in taking over the world the right way. What do you say, Komari? Will you help me out?”

She reached out her hand. Her eyes were absolutely serious.

I felt utter respect for her. No regular person would be able to endure what she’d gone through. She’d had her family taken from her, her status stripped, and yet she became a commander through her own efforts. She was an inspiration. This was the kind of person who could change the world.

I didn’t think there was anything I could really help with, but I wasn’t against the idea.

“Yeah...let’s do it.”

I grasped her hand, and she smiled.

“Hee-hee. Thank you, Komari. Well then, let’s make a toast to our new alliance. We’re going to have fun today until our bodies can’t handle any more. We can swim in the sea, or we can go back to the hotel and play maid-and-mistress, and then we could have a barbecue and do some fireworks at night.”

“Y-yeah! Let’s have a blast!”

I was unusually excited. Nelia was no longer my enemy. No explosions, no

pretensions, no running away. I could just have a fun time!

“Oh yeah! How about we start with some beach volleyball?” I proposed.

“Sounds good. How about we make a bet? Whoever loses becomes the other’s servant.”

“S-servant?! You...still want me to do that?”

“Of course I do. I’m not giving up on having you wear that the maid outfit.”

“Give it up! You have a perfectly good maid right there! Gertrude!”

“You can never have enough. Well, regardless of what happens to our game of beach volleyball, I’m looking forward to our war tomorrow. It may be a joke now, but whoever loses the war will have to obey the winner. That’s a hard-and-fast rule. I will make you wear that dress soon.”

...Ah? What’s she talking about?

“Vill, has she gone crazy from the heat?”

“Oh my, I forgot to mention it. The letter Lady Cunningham sent came with both the invitation and a war declaration.”

“Wha—?”

“Come over to the resort, and let’s do war, too, it said. Something like that. And yes, that rule about the loser becoming the winner’s servant was included as well.”

“WHAT?!” I stood up, watermelon in hand. “No! Why didn’t you tell me?!”

“Well, you didn’t ask. Or read the letter yourself.”

“That’s true, but c’mon, you could’ve told me!”

“There’ll be no problem as long as you win.”

“How in the world do you think I could win?! She’s a super murderer who’s killed five thousand!”

“I-it’s okay, Ms. Komari! The battle hasn’t started yet,” Sakuna said.

“R-right! Nelia! I’m sorry, but I’m positive I’m going to have some urgent business to attend to, so I gotta go back to Mulnite in advance! I’m so sorry to

have your invitation go to waste, but that's just life. Bye."

"No, Komari. This isn't an individual battle between us two; it's an official sports-war between both countries. Reporters and spectators already know about it, and they'll come," Nelia said.

"..."

"You'll be put to shame if you don't assist. Everyone will think Terakomari Gandesblood is a coward. Your subordinates will be disappointed, and then they might revolt against you."

"....."

"But don't worry, I'll go easy on you. Let this be a demonstration on how you and I will conquer the world."

"B-but..."

"You won't get to play in the beach if you go now. You won't get to see those oh so pretty fireworks or look at the stars with me. I also have a huge omelet rice prepared for you back at the hotel. You won't stay to eat?"

".....Right. Yeah. Can't leave."

There was no escape.

So we return to the prologue.



The next day. I really arrived at the battlefield, oh man.

Nelia's objective was to fight Mulnite in order to amass honor and win the election. Basically, she was using me as a political tool. The worst. And I couldn't run from it. Truly awful. *Also*, I would have to become her maid and call her "Mistress" if I lost. This was worse than despair.

And so Nelia appeared before me.

Peach-colored hair, girlish uniform, sharp blades drenched in blood in both hands... The monarch...no, the next president of the blade nation. The Moonpeach Princess. Nelia Cunningham.

The murderer, as young as I was, smiled innocently, as though meeting an old

friend. Yet her voice was oppressive as she spoke.

“Komari, be my servant.”

“Not in a million years!!”

“Ha-ha. Resist while you can. But it is your destiny to be by my side! We are comrades in search for world peace. As long as we join hands, no enemy can defeat us!”

That’s how I got a “comrade in my search for world peace,” whatever that meant. I mean, who says that while threatening you with a sword?? Well, she was very different from Madhart and Rainsworth and their ilk.

With a burning will, her eyes shone bright. A will inherited from Yulinne Gandesblood.

To create a world where people don’t prioritize their own gains but act for the good of one another. That was the next president’s real, unabashed ambition.

I sighed.

Yeah, maybe taking over the world was possible with her.

I must be such an idiot for feeling moved by that at this exact moment..., I thought as I stared at her radiant smug face.

Lonne Cornelius witnessed something unbelievable.

The atrociously evil organization Inverse Moon's number two was hanging his head as he sat on a bench.

Crowds came and went in abnormal numbers at the capital of the Gerra-Aruka Republic. The Warblades were holding a "Revolution Festival" to celebrate Madhart's demise. Cornelius was also in on the festivities and had just bought *taiyaki* at one of the stalls.

She glanced at Amatsu once again. Forget about pigs flying; they might even begin traveling through space soon.

"What happened? I'm willing to lend you an ear and a shoulder."

"Don't ask."

"Is it...because the plan failed?"

"..."

Bull's-eye. Cornelius's whole face lit up.

"Yeah, that was a huge screwup. We were supposed to use Gerra-Aruka to get some intel on the Dark Core, and then Nelia Cunningham and Terakomari would blow Madhart out of the water. But forget about the Dark Core! What are you so bummed about, really?"

"Her Highness got mad at me."

"Pfft. Ha-ha-ha! Did you know, Amatsu? Inverse Moon isn't kind to those who fail. Off with your head! You're dead!"

Then he punched her shoulder and looked at her impassively.

"No, the plan was a great success."

"How exactly? Wait, no, don't take my *taiyaki*—c'mon, I only have one more left."

He ate the whole thing.

"Ugh, red-bean paste?" He crossed his arms.

"What's wrong with red-bean paste?"

“My cousin made me eat them all the time long ago. She was practicing her baking or something.”

“But they’re so tasty... Don’t change the subject, though; what do you mean it was a success?”

“Our objective was to destroy the Gerra-Aruka Republic.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“We had Terakomari Gandesblood destroy the Gerra-Aruka base to rile up Madhart. We sold them Divine Instruments to make the Aruka government more aggressive. Though we didn’t expect they’d launch a war so quickly.”

“I don’t get it. So having them start the war was our goal?”

“Our goal was to have them start the war *to* destroy Aruka. Madhart was overconfident and foolish—it was almost certain he would lose. Even if he didn’t, the truth behind the Daydream Paradise would have come to light eventually. And then Gerra-Aruka would fall.”

“...Hmm? So we just wanted Gerra-Aruka to fall?”

“That’s what I said right at the beginning, you moron.”

“I’m not a moron!”

“In short, Her Highness greatly disliked Madhart’s administration. They were holding inhumane experiments using the Dark Core’s infinite regenerative abilities. They repeatedly tested that wicked immortality.”

“Oh. Yeah, I see how she wouldn’t like that.”

In this world, where the Dark Core’s healing was common sense, the biggest tragedy was the belittling of human life. Inverse Moon’s slogan being that “life is meant to be in the shadow of death,” this was the greatest taboo for them.

What Gerra-Aruka had done constituted the opposite of Inverse Moon’s desires.

“...Hmm? Wait, then why did Her Highness get mad at you?”

“She told me to take better care of my family.”

“What?”

She really didn't understand.

Amatsu spoke with absolute seriousness. "Karla Amatsu appeared on Six Nations News' broadcast, remember? She's my cousin. Her Highness yelled at me for not taking care of her."

"Unlike everyone else, you have family! Stop worrying your cousin, or you'll regret it! I'm giving you time off, so go see her!"

"...So she said."

"Then go meet her."

"I can't."

"You're ashamed of going back home? How old are you again? Want me to go with you?"

"That would only bring more trouble."

"Just take it easy. I'll throw you a send-off party. I'll make shiitake steak."

"No...though, well... Hmmm."

Amatsu crossed his arms again and stared at the sky. It was rare seeing him like this...but still, she was sure he was concocting all sort of evil schemes in his mind, no matter how he looked on the outside.

Finally, Kakumei closed his eyes and said something unbelievably evil.

"Going after the Heavenly Paradise wouldn't be so bad. We can use that girl's powers."

"You're really rotten to the core."

"You're aware we're both villains in the eyes of society?"

"Right." Cornelius chuckled.

The heroes had defeated the evil president.

But war wasn't going anywhere any time soon.

Afterword

Nice to see you again, it's Kotei Kobayashi.

Regarding this novel, I often get told, *"I get the vampires and beast-folk, but what's up with all the others?"* The first volume only took place within the vampire nation, so it really didn't matter (excuse the wording) what the other countries and races were. However, now that we're on Volume 3 and the world is expanding, the diverse characteristics concerning the rest of the populace are finally coming to light. Although, as you might see, the vampires in this story are a bit different from those in other works of fiction. They walk under the sunlight like normal and fool around on the beach, and they sometimes even duel with crosses, so it may not be wrong to call them fake vampires (and then you have our protagonist, who can't even drink blood, so she's a sham among shams). What I'm trying to get at is that they're not as alien as they may sound. As you might've noticed while reading the book, all of them are equally called "humans," be they vampire, Warblade, Sapphire, or whatever other race. If compared to the real world, they would simply be like people of different nationalities. They can communicate with one another and can all be friends. That's the point of the story this time. Though they do a lot of killing in this book.

Now then, I'm writing this in August 2020, so I can't freely go outside. We're all living the shut-in life in the real world, and that's why I had Komari travel outside the Mulnite Empire. For us currently, it's truly a world of fantasy, where people meet up with friends at the beach and visit new towns and cities. I hope you were all able to enjoy the fun mood of the resort vacation as much as Komari did.

Now, for some words of thanks.

Thank you to riichu for the amazing art as always; to Ryo Hiiragi for the magnificent book-cover design; to my editor, Yoten Sugiura, for always being so

patient with my revisions to the manuscript; and to everyone else who was involved at some point in the production of this book. Finally, of course, thank you to all my readers who have picked up this book. Thank you so much, everyone!!!

Hopefully Volume 4 will bring you another straightforward Komari-ish story.

Kotei Kobayashi

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